

THE ABSURD STATE

POLITICAL SATIRE AND BLACK COMEDY

IN BRITISH DRAMA 1964 - 1974

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D E D I C A T I O N

To my family back home. To my parents, who have been far more than good parents to me, and to John, Sheila and my nephew Steve Cramer the younger, who I hope to see for the first time, at some time soon.

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

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It has become a critical commonplace of recent years that the current period of political drama started with the upheavals of 1968. It is often stated that before that year, playwrights of the post 1956 generation generally held liberal views which were broadly critical of British society's major institutions, but stopped short of criticising such bodies as the Labour Party. My aim will be to reassess this view in the light of the black comedies of the period 1964 to 1974. These plays held in common a number of stylistic characteristics and thematic obsessions, and were particularly notable for their close reference to contemporary events and political crises. In attempting to establish a continuity through this period, I will try to reappropriate to the modern canon a number of playwrights, who have been marginalised or forgotten since the mid seventies. I also deal with several of the "major" works of the period, with specific reference to their relevance to contemporary events at the time of their initial productions. This will necessitate a certain amount of detailed historical background.

The thesis is divided into two halves, comprising three and two chapters, respectively. The first part examines the premierships of Home, Wilson and Heath in that order, with particular reference to the way in which the politics and character of each were reflected in black comic satire. The second half of the thesis considers three black comic stereotypes, each of which mirrored the leading social themes of the day. The figure of the meritocrat, the "classless" individual who rises to prominence on the strength of his or her own abilities, a particular political creation of our period is lampooned mercilessly throughout, although in different ways, depending upon the historical circumstances. Doctors and Policemen are also characteristic figures of the period, and I consider the way in which the latter group, in particular, provided a succession of stock characters which would be moulded to address particular public scandals in the immediate wake of their occurrences.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I owe my greatest debt in the production of this thesis to Dr. Roger Savage. His amendments and suggestions have been invaluable to the shaping of the work - it was his suggestion that I read The Chiltern Hundreds as a parodic vehicle for The Ruling Class. He has also made countless other suggestions and amendments throughout the thesis. But far more than this, Roger has remained ebullient in my own moments of despair, and has been good company whenever I have seen him, turning the supervisor/post graduate relationship into a good deal of fun. I have been lucky indeed, in my supervisor. Countless other people have helped me along the way, but I should single out Sue, who has been patient and supportive, and my friends at No. 43 who have helped to lighten things up, and Mala, who was always understanding. Finally, I should like to thank Mrs. Hilary Lothian, my typist, whose life and that of Peter, her husband, has been disrupted by my demands, and who has responded by working with impressive speed, accuracy and diligence.

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PREFACE

When I came to Edinburgh from Australia in 1985 I knew little of this country, or of its politics. My parents were British emigrants of the sixties (I was, in fact, born in England, but have little memory of it), and are of a fairly political nature, but the talk, or rather, my childhood memories of the talk, in the period which coincides with that of this thesis was almost entirely of Vietnam, a tragedy which in many ways dominates Australian politics to this day. All this biographical confession is not nostalgic self indulgence, but serves to make two points which may be significant to the reading of the thesis: firstly that it is written from a foreign point of view, by someone who did not live through the political events and social upheavals which form a crucial part of the commentary, and secondly, that the writer is generationally alienated from the period about which we will be concerned. As I believe that any work of this kind should be prefaced with some form of political declaration, I will crave the reader's indulgence for a final confession. Having been brought up in a working class family with avowedly Labour Party values, I am not sure that I fully support any established political party, but would answer, if pushed on the political question, in the way that Snoo Wilson has: "I vote Labour with reservations - that's being a socialist, isn't it?".

A few points need to be made about the presentation of the thesis. I have provided a certain amount of plot summary to some of the plays covered in the thesis, because the narratives themselves are often important to the understanding of the way in which the drama of the period mirrors its social background.

Further, even an experienced and well read commentator on the period could not be expected to be fully conversant with such plays as Trixie and Baba, or The Borage Pigeon Affair - simply locating the texts of such work is, I know from experience, frequently problematical. The dates given in parenthesis next to the first citings of texts are those of the first performances, not of publication dates or subsequent performances. Occasionally, where texts have not been cited for some time, I have, for the reader's convenience, repeated the year of first performance. I have reproduced stage directions by italicising all directions which the texts either italicise or underline, and copied the texts exactly where stage directions occur in normal typeface. I have reproduced quotations exactly, and am therefore not responsible for any spelling errors or inaccuracies which occur in quotations. I have indulged in a minor scholarly impropriety during the introduction in reproducing only page numbers, rather than full citations of those texts which will be frequently cited later in the thesis, (Bull, Itzin, Chambers and Prior, and Taylor), and in the Bibliography. Again, I have done this for the convenience of the reader, since the original draft of the introduction threatened to be so congested with footnotes that its flow (such as it is) would be interrupted.

Of the bibliography, I should say that it would be quite impossible to cite every text or article consulted in the course of producing this thesis. The articles of political commentary and contemporary journalistic theatre criticism alone would, I am sure, if fully reproduced, double the length of the thesis. I have therefore restricted myself to those articles cited within the text itself, plus a few others which I regard as strictly

germane to my central argument. The same principle applies to the plays and books of political commentary cited. Where articles are concerned I have only cited page numbers where the journals involved would be of such a length (say 100 pages or more) to make the articles difficult to locate. So, for example, I have not provided page references to articles appearing in New Society, but I have in such volumes as Modern Drama. The articles cited as political background are, in any case, mostly editorials or feature articles, and should not therefore be difficult to locate in the relevant volumes.

Finally, I should draw the reader's attention to an article which anticipated somewhat my own work in the first half of the final chapter, on the medical profession as portrayed in black comedy: M. Pfister and H. Quadfleig, "The Comedy of Disease: patients, doctors and national health in contemporary English drama", Anglistik & Englishunterricht, 20, 1983, pp.49-66. I completed Chapter Five chronologically first among the chapters of this work, in 1986, and did not become aware of this article until it appeared in the Modern Drama Annual Bibliography of 1987. I have since read this piece, and have been pleased to find that it corroborates some, although not all, of my own observations. I have not, however cited it in the bibliography, as I did not read it in my preparation for Chapter Five.

I will now make the customary declaration which must accompany all PhD Theses at the University of Edinburgh:

I hereby declare that all work within the thesis has been composed by myself. The work is entirely my own, except where other sources have clearly been indicated.



Steven L. Cramer

INTRODUCTION

ONE MAN FOR COLVERTON

"That happened in 1964. What a splendid year that was to become a full-time theatre critic! The great theatrical event of the day was supposed to have been John Osborne's Look Back in Anger [...] But 1964!"

B.A. Young, The Mirror Up to Nature, London, 1982, p.13.

Of the period roughly coinciding with that examined in this thesis Gareth Lloyd Evans notes the proliferation of a form of "comedy [which] seems to have lost its bright eyes and become black in look and mordant in temper. Farce, too, has apparently lost its athletic naivete and become sinister".¹ In 1964 George Wellwarth remarked, in fact of a forerunner of the group of dramatists we will be considering, N.F. Simpson, that "The avant-garde drama is rapidly demonstrating that farce is the most serious of all art forms".² This importance would increase throughout our period of 1964 to 1974, but its use would become even more adventurous than Simpson's "farce in a new dimension", in that it would become yet more political than Simpson's, which has been recognised as political in broad terms³, but which was not particularly specific in its references to contemporary society.

I think that one should be suspicious of those who seek to put a particular date upon the beginning or end of a particular artistic movement, yet the year 1964 does seem to have been widely acknowledged by critics as one in which something, although as to precisely what there is some contention, happened in British theatre. During his survey of British drama in the period 1951-1964, J.C. Trewin could already designate the period often associated with Osborne after 1956 "a transient period of anger"⁴ and would also note that "such other vague words as "cosy", "distancing" and "sick" were of the future. "Satire", which would become a synonym for a type of intimate revue, might still mean Juvenal or Swift".⁵ He goes on to cite, as an example of the change which was overtaking British theatre, the "monotonous" Entertaining Mr. Sloane, calling it a black comedy, but placing inverted commas around the phrase, as

if dealing with another unfamiliar term.⁶ Within a year such qualifications would become redundant. In the British Council sponsored book that followed Trewin's, which defined as its period one which corresponds very nearly to our own, J.W. Lambert speaks of the theatre since 1964 as a "ferment of activity"⁷, but is, perhaps justifiably, reluctant to argue for any particular movement or thematic homogeneity among British dramatists.

A later generation of critics tend to pinpoint 1968, with its vast international political upheavals, as a landmark in British theatrical history. Itzin (pp.1-7)⁸ gives a quite accurate political commentary on the period, citing the Prague uprising, the Paris disturbances and the Vietnam War, amongst other events, as being central to the political awakening of a number of contemporary British dramatists. This may be true, but is there a great deal to verify it in the plays themselves? In fact, many of the early comedies of such writers as Mercer and Bond (each of whom are included in Itzin's survey) are primarily concerned with Britain and the British and make only incidental allusions to events abroad such as Vietnam. Where Itzin cites such local events as the Abortion Reform Act of 1967 (p.2), she does not much elaborate upon it, and fails completely to recognise that much of the drama of the period before 1968 had discussed this issue in depth. Chambers and Prior designate 1956 to 1968 as a particular historical period of British drama, where "The post-1956 writers had generally held radical political views in the sense of supporting unilateral nuclear disarmament or voting Labour but they still tended to work within the given system" (p.17). This may be a fair account of Osborne or Wesker, but what of Orton, the early Bond, or Mercer

and perhaps more importantly, a great number of playwrights working in this period who have since been marginalised or forgotten? Does the fact that the work of, say, Livings, offers no direct socialist political solution to the social issues he portrays make him part of the Labour establishment or a manifestation of conservative backlash? More to the point, are the early works of Brenton or Hare as explicitly political, in terms of propounding direct political solutions as is imputed to them by the post 1968 school of criticism? Bull is less didactic in his initial approach, rejecting Itzin's claims of international socialism as a driving force for British drama (pp.9-10), but himself going on to identify 1968 as a particular turning point in the radicalisation of British drama both theatrically and politically. Having gestured vaguely to Orton and Bond in his introduction as having paved the way for the great transformation of 1968, he goes on to discuss, in great depth, Brenton, Hare, Edgar and Griffiths.

Underlying all this is the implication that "these are the dramatists who really count". Of course they are, but so perfunctory is the coverage of earlier playwrights, that any brief allusion will frequently misrepresent them. The only allusion to Cregan, for example, in any of the three last mentioned works, occurs in the book by Chambers and Prior, where Three Men for Colverton is mentioned as a "specific locale to generalise a nation" play (p.84) - true enough, but the writers do not even get the play's title right, calling it "Three Men of Colverton". The difference is important, since the word "of" might imply, in this context, a traditional "olde England", giving the play a sense of a political force already existing within an established political system, rather than the word

"for" which implies, in the sense intended by the play, a group of possible choices, none of which are particularly tasteful, to a changing community. The error is one which may be forced by an ideological prejudice. To Chambers and Prior, even Orton's work is "unresponsive to social reality" (p.110) and is dismissed within the space of a single page.

Such responsiveness to social reality is a criterion by which playwrights can be judged to be political or, in effect, conservative. But the syllabus set by such critics is one which must necessarily ignore earlier manifestations of social satire which do not conform to their particular dialectical scheme of things. The fact that Stoppard spends as much time satirising the police in the early seventies as does Brenton must be ignored. Social satirists who were given such prominence in Taylor's books Anger and After and The Second Wave, such as Gray, Livings, Nichols and Cregan must be set aside or given distorted mentions to support a case which runs in favour of playwrights designated, possibly for ideological reasons, as major. One may learn from, say, Grant⁹ or Wandor, that the election of the Labour Government of 1964 was a major disappointment for socialist and liberal theatre workers everywhere, but if one were an undergraduate student of the drama of the sixties, it could be inferred from these critics that it somehow took until 1968 for this disappointment to become manifest in political drama. It is notable also that among the three most prolific writers of the Portable Theatre, Hare, Brenton and Wilson, it is the latter, a political satirist who has steadfastly avoided any self-conscious form of dogma, who is least discussed. This despite the fact that he is the only one of the three writers to remain within the framework of

the widely-admired fringe style of the Portable Theatre. Although not as resolutely ignored as many other writers, it is indicative of Wilson's position that Rabey discusses Brenton and Hare indefatigably through the latter part of his book, British and Irish Political Drama in the Twentieth Century, but can find time for only a footnote on the work of Wilson (p.227). Even conservative critics such as Hobson have in recent years taken up the idea that British drama changed out of all recognition after 1968, although Hobson bases his argument mainly upon the abolition of the Lord Chamberlain, rather than political changes in the world outside the theatre.¹⁰

All this sounds very polemical, but I do not intend to diminish the work of such writers as Brenton and Hare who, for reasons to be set down, I regard as important writers of the period. Nor, in fact, do I intend to cast aspersions on the quality of the criticism mentioned above - Bull and Itzin in particular, would rate high on any reading list that I would set a beginner in the drama of the sixties and seventies. Rather, I intend to reappropriate a great number of plays to a period of political satire, and in so doing, alter slightly the perceived shape of a period of theatrical history. I would contend, on the simple grounds that a great many comedies of satirical and political intent began to appear at around the time of the decline of the Home government and the first election of Wilson to Prime Ministership, that loosely, a "movement" of political satire began at this point. This "movement" was characterised by comedies which made use of parody, grotesquerie, and particularly farce as a satiric vehicle, but it did not put up any particular ideological construct in opposition to the societal ills which it laid bare. This lack of an oppositional

political programme with which to accompany the satire of black comedy is important, since it is something which is as characteristic of the cynical and self-serving world of Orton's Loot as it is of Brenton's Revenge or Christie in Love. There are few truly sympathetic characters in these plays, although characters are developed differently, and generally in greater psychological depth in the latter part of the period, for reasons which relate closely to changes in contemporary British society.

In adding a great many forgotten plays to the analysis of a time which would already be known to readers of this era, I hope to show the importance of topicality to the working of black comedy in our designated period. Virtually all of the plays to be discussed in the thesis relate to topical events and social themes, which may by now have been forgotten. The contemporary nature of the satire is absolutely central to establishing the political nature of these plays, many of which would not otherwise be recognised as discussing the body politic. It is this topicality which links this group of dramatists, more so than any commonly held political belief. Only when viewed from the point of view of a detailed, historically informed position, can it be seen that Bennett and Hare, for instance, can have produced plays about almost the same central character, at the same time, in the figure of the disillusioned Labour MP. Hare's The Great Exhibition is widely commented upon, but in Bennett's Getting On, whose run slightly preceded and coincided with that of The Great Exhibition has been effectively erased from the record of contemporary dramatic historians.

The thesis will be divided roughly into two halves. The

first, constituting chapters one to three, will discuss the parliamentary political history of the period and its reflection upon technique and imagery amongst black comic satirists. Lord Home, and the old patrician values for which he represented a figurehead, would be assaulted with particular relish by such writers as Potter, Mercer and Barnes, who developed increasingly sophisticated forms of farce in dealing with the contemporary image of the aristocracy. At around the same time, the election of Wilson, and the manifest failures and hypocrisies of his first and second premierships attracted derision from such diverse writers as Cregan, Bennett and Bond, amongst whom was demonstrated a remarkable unanimity of formal approach, particularly in the use of allegory. After Enoch Powell's rise to prominence following his "rivers of blood" speech, Snoo Wilson, Brenton and Hare would follow such writers as Exton and Livings in their condemnation of the New Right, and the implicit collusion of the Labour Party, through their failure to oppose a new and dangerous political movement with sufficient vigour.

The fourth chapter will examine a ubiquitous figure among the comedies of our period, that of the meritocrat. An almost completely unrecognised stock character of satire of the decade, this new "classless" individual would be portrayed as bogus and dangerously impersonal in the first half of the years under consideration, and ruthless and psychologically disturbed in the second. The secretive and technocratic stereotypes of Orton, Marcus and Eveling in the sixties, would be replaced by their egoistic, unbalanced and ultimately malicious equivalents in the dramas of Churchill, Bennett and Hare in the seventies. Finally, the fifth chapter will consider two other stock

characters of this period, policemen and doctors. Through the work of such writers as Stoppard, Gray and Nichols, the chapter will attempt to illustrate the almost agit-prop, contemporary nature of black comedy, by examining the closeness with which fictional representation mirrored historical events in the satiric treatment of various scandals which surrounded these two professions over the decade.

The reader might note that several of the dramatists discussed in the thesis (Gallacher and Taylor, for example) have frequently engaged in a polemic relating to specifically Scottish issues. The choice of the contentious word "British" in my title is bound to raise justifiable questions as to my intent. To this, I should say simply that the dramatists mentioned above were not primarily concerned at this point of their development with politics of this sort. In their black comedies of the period, they were concerned for the most part with "national" issues within the political and legal ambit of the United Kingdom, such as abortion and policing. Within this context, I feel justified in using the term "British" pragmatically.

FOOTNOTES

1. G. Lloyd Evans, The Language of Modern Drama (London, 1977), pp.205-206.
2. G. Wellwarth, The Theatre of Protest and Paradox (London, 1965), p.212.
3. M. Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd (Harmondsworth, 1961 – revised edition, 1980), pp.302-310.
4. J.C. Trewin, Drama in Britain 1951-1964 (London, 1965), p.22.
5. Ibid. p.10.
6. Ibid. p.45.
7. J.W. Lambert, Drama in Britain 1964-1973 (London, 1974)
8. For the convenience of the reader I have, rather than congest my introduction with footnotes, simply cited page numbers of volumes which will be fully cited, and frequently referred to, later.
9. S. Grant, "The New Writers", S. Craig Dreams and Deconstructions, (Ambergate, 1980), pp.116-144.
10. H. Hobson, Theatre in Britain: A Personal View (Oxford, 1984), pp. 200-236

CHAPTER ONE

LORD HOME AND THE ARISTOCRACY

1964 - 1968

"Explaining how he was "unlucky enough to hit the time when satire was fashionable", this much-loved elder statesman continues:

"I think it did make a difficult situation more difficult for me than it need have been. It was the height of TWTWTW - all that rather nasty debunking of authority".

What he does not seem to realise is that it was the appointment of the 14th Earl of Home (alias Baillie Vass. Recreations: love-making, needlework) as Prime Minister which set the whole satire industry on its feet. There was no accident involved. He created the situation in his benign and half-witted way, by being the first totally satirical Prime Minister".

Auberon Waugh, Four Crowded Years: The Diaries of Auberon Waugh 1972-1976, London, 1976, 24th September, 1974. (No page numbers are given in this volume).

In the summer of 1960, when Derick Heathcote-Amory retired from the Chancellory, Macmillan moved Selwyn Lloyd from the Foreign Office to replace him, and in turn offered the post of Foreign Secretary to Rab Butler, only to be surprised by Butler's refusal of the position. Thrown a little off-balance, Macmillan turned to the House of Lords, seeking a substitute fieldsman for his twelfth man, and appointed to the office a patriotic, decent mediocrity. It is difficult to find, in any publication, a welcoming word for this appointment. Much later, the new Foreign Secretary would quote some of the reviews that the announcement of his appointment would bring. The Daily Mail urged Macmillan not to go ahead with the nomination, saying that there was still time for the Prime Minister "to stop making a fool of himself", but the appointment was made. "What have we done to deserve this?" bannered The Daily Herald, whilst another editorial lamented "Never since Caligula appointed his horse consul has a political office been so abused".¹ The recipient of all this acrimonious vitriol was Lord Alec Douglas-Home. Home's selection caused such an uproar partially because as a peer, his appointment to such an important office was "constitutionally objectionable and not good for the conduct of our affairs in the world" as Hugh Gaitskell remarked in the no-confidence debate which was initiated on the matter,² and partially because he was simply "insufficiently distinguished", as The Times put it, to hold such a position in government.³ Yet more astonishing events were to come. A succession of unforeseen contretemps would, in the period immediately preceding the opening of our period, bring about the incredible scenario of his elevation to the premiership, in conditions which would cause irreparable damage to his party's electoral

credibility.

The year following October, 1962 (especially the summer of 1963) was an extremely bad one for the Conservative government. The Vassall affair was followed by the shattering crisis of the Profumo scandal. There was also an increasingly evident balance of payments deficit, and the still more perplexing problem of the party's, and particularly Macmillan's, inability to project a sufficiently progressive and youthful image,⁴ something which was attacked with particular relish by cartoonists.⁵ All this was followed by a "Macmillan must go" campaign, which was observed by the press and supported in both the backbenches and part of the cabinet. The public row continued throughout the summer and into the Autumn, culminating in a visit to Macmillan by Lord Poole and, significantly, Lord Home to (according to one report) "plainly [tell] him that it was his duty to retire."⁶ Macmillan announced that it was his intention to remain leader, and to address the impending Blackpool Conservative party Conference of October 1963, in that capacity. Shortly before he was due to address the conference, however, it became evident that a prostate gland infection which had troubled Macmillan for some time had developed to such serious proportions that his health demanded that he stand down immediately. In doing so in the middle of the party conference Macmillan created the conditions for perhaps the most widely publicised and divisive in-party brawl in the post-war period, comparable to the E.E.C. debate within the Labour Party in the mid-seventies, and the leadership, deputy leadership and SDP controversies within the same party of the early eighties, but still more intensively publicised. The man regarded as Macmillan's natural successor

was Rab Butler, who had been an able deputy to the Prime Minister for a number of years. Even within a day of the announcement of the new leader, Butler was quoted by London bookmakers as the hot favourite to become Prime Minister,⁷ probably because he was widely supported in the cabinet, especially by the younger generation of Tories, amongst them Iain Macleod, Edward Heath, Enoch Powell, Sir Edward Boyle and Sir Keith Joseph, whilst Reginald Maudling, an extremely influential figure, supported Butler on condition that his own "dark horse" candidature failed.⁸ Butler had the problem however, of Macmillan, who was implacably opposed to Butler's succession,⁹ and had made it known abroad that he wished Lord Hailsham (soon to renounce his peerage to become Quintin Hogg) to be the next Prime Minister.¹⁰ He was also beset by antipathy from constituency branches over the "left-wing" image of he and his supporters (in the cases of Joseph and Powell this was clearly, in any case an error of judgement), and by a certain hostility from a minority of "high Tories" in the cabinet, such as John Hare, Sir Christopher Soames and Ernest Marples. Thus, Maudling was wrong when he stated that he did not believe that any cabinet ministers supported Hailsham,¹¹ but clearly there was a division between the overwhelming majority of the cabinet, on Butler's side, and Macmillan and the "party faithful" favouring Hailsham. The problem with Hailsham was that many were suspicious of the backwards looking and reactionary image of Churchill's protégé, and whilst the right wing of the party adored Hailsham, he seemed unable to win over a sufficient number of cabinet ministers to form a credible government. Further, Hailsham's gimmicky and "presidential" campaign for the leadership alienated many on his own side, leading him to be compared to a

pop star,¹² and giving rise to the question of whether the party was "sufficiently convinced that the situation is desperate [enough] to put up with Hailsham's semi-Churchillian volatility for the sake of the Dunkirk spirit."¹³

It was not, but an impasse had arisen which seemed to have no solution. Of the other possibles, Maudling was said by Hailsham "to combine most of Butler's disadvantages without all his distinction"¹⁴ and MacLeod, after his very liberal and pro-African spell as Colonial Secretary, would never be brooked by the party's right wing.¹⁵ Some time after the leadership struggle was set in motion, Macmillan, realising that his own first choice would not succeed, called on Lord Home to stand. The Spectator had long seen Home as "far the easiest compromise",¹⁶ an obvious expediency, but hardly an inspiring choice, as a modern leader whose health greatly worried his party, and who had "a patrician distaste for shedding his title, leaving his grouse moor and becoming plain Mr. Alec Douglas-Home, MP."¹⁷ Home had not, before his encouragement by Macmillan, regarded himself as a serious cabinet contender for leadership, and had offered, at the sparking of the leadership crisis, to take soundings of possible contenders. This in retrospect appeared a devious tactic, as though even the noble Earl of Home had descended to the cut-throat political beauty contest which had transpired. In any case, Macmillan instructed Martin Redmayne, the chief whip, to take soundings on all levels as to the acceptability of Home as leader. This process was an unclear, even secretive one to the outside world, and seemed to confirm Harold Wilson's assertion that far from being democratic, the means by which Conservative leaders "emerged" (to use the Tories' own word) involved a "magic circle" of a few

aristocrats and old Etonians, who took more account of background than ability in the selection of leaders. Reginald Maudling added weight to this theory a few days before Home's confirmation as leader by remarking to the press "I do admire the political skill our aristocracy have now acquired. It seems to me that he wants the job and that it's all over."¹⁸

Upon Home's "emergence" the press attacked the unhappy compromise as ill-according to a modern world. In New Society, Richard Rose, a widely respected political scientist, had attacked the system of selection even before Home was chosen.¹⁹ A week later, when Home was Prime Minister, the New Society editorial pointed out that three of the last four Prime Ministers had been aristocrats, and "the fourth, Mr. Macmillan, was merely an old Etonian who had married a duke's daughter." To this was added the back-handed mitigation that Home was "as good a representative of the system that one could expect to find...[but that] the real test will be his vision of society today" (their emphasis). But the question of whether he would be "a strong PM or an ineffectual caretaker"²⁰ had already been answered by many within the party.²¹ The Tory cause was not helped by Powell and Macleod, who refused to serve under Home in the new cabinet, on the grounds that he was basically both an anachronism and a poor choice as leader, nor by the three other main contenders, Butler, Hailsham and Maudling, the latter two (acknowledging their own inability to take control) refusing to serve under anyone but Butler. These three lasted for a day of confused hostility before they were half bullied and half cajoled by Home and Macmillan, who was recovering from surgery, back into the new cabinet. Another month passed before, on the eve of our era, and in what had to be an election year, Martin

Redmayne more or less admitted to something of a "magic circle" in Home's election.²² The old high conservatives of the party replied by pointing to the fact that this was in any case the tradition in the party and that no rules had been broken, but this only provided the opposition with more fire-power, as they made a succession of speeches attacking the ritualistic emptiness of such traditions, Wilson commenting "For the commanding heights of British Industry to be controlled today by men whose only claim is their aristocratic connections or [...] inherited wealth [...] is as irrelevant to the twentieth century as would be the continued purchase of commissions in the armed forces by lordly amateurs."²³

This was possibly the most major party political rift of our era, although it occurred, of course, two months before the period with which we are concerned. It had been prefigured in January and February of 1963 by a similar event in the unexpected death of Hugh Gaitskell and subsequent election to the leadership of the Labour Party of Harold Wilson. Here once again, the expected "heir to the throne", George Brown, for years the competent and loyal deputy to Gaitskell, was defeated by Wilson. This occurred primarily because of a failure to unite the right-wing of the party, who put up two candidates (Brown and James Callaghan), and in the case of Brown, ran a poor campaign, which stressed an element of factionalism by making it known that Brown, if elected leader, would not tolerate Wilson as his deputy. This forced many undecided members of the parliamentary party to vote for Wilson on the grounds of his appeal to party unity, after the fashion of Attlee. This campaign, too, was widely publicised and fraught with angry bluster although not so much so as the Tory election, firstly

because it did not begin on the highly charged and public occasion of a party conference, and secondly because the Labour Party at that time enjoyed a much higher morale than the Tories, who had, as I have explained, experienced an extremely bad year.

These unfortunate events, particularly the rise of Lord Home, became a metaphor through which the shortcomings of conservative and highly institutionalised power structures were examined in the black comedies of the coming years. Indeed, on the eve of our period, shortly after Home's election to the leadership, the first black comedy which one suspects relates to Home, had already appeared. Roger Milner's farce Upside Downing Street (1963)²⁴ presented a "reductio ad absurdum" version of the rise of Home, where a backbench MP of undesignated party (although if, as we gather he was elected in the 1950 general election he is very liable to be a Conservative) who has attended the House of Commons regularly for twelve years without saying a word, suddenly finds himself in command of the country when the rest of Parliament is wiped out in an explosion at a secret meeting he had been unable to attend. The problem of the succession to political power of an inadequacy who is a politically expedient choice within a massive, conservative, although not necessarily parliamentary, institution would recur again and again over the next five years. In Peter Luke's The Play of Hadrian VII (1967),²⁵ the totally inappropriate figure of Frederick Rolfe is elected Pope, for the very negative reason that his colleagues and supporters at the Vatican wish to prevent the accession of Cardinal Ragna. "If the reactionaries have their way and Ragna is elected", warns Bishop Talacryn, "it is my belief that it would set the church back a hundred years"

(p.32), so he is prepared to sponsor Rolfe, the only one amongst the cut-throat cardinals who is sufficiently acceptable to prevent Ragna from winning. Rolfe is amazed to find himself a candidate, and when he is elected his zealous reformism leads the cardinals to regret not nominating Cardinal Gentilotto, described as "an old man but a good man. He would have been no trouble" (p.41). Henceforth the play becomes an analogy for the Kennedy presidency, culminating in the assassination of Hadrian VII (Rolfe) by a fanatical Ulster protestant, Jeremiah Sant, then dissolving into what the entire play proves to be, an elaborate dream of the impoverished scholar, Frederick Rolfe. The Home metaphor is used only in the middle section of the play, which in its printed form is shorter than in the original version.²⁶ Of course a certain amount of circumspection is necessary in considering an adaptation of a novel written several decades before, but the element of political chicanery within a secretive and highly conservative institution which suffers from uncertain leadership is very much to the fore in Luke's version.

A more substantial allegory (and its writer acknowledges, reluctantly, that allegory is part of the play's purpose) is Cregan's Three Men for Colverton (1966),²⁷ a play which also concerns the church (this time Anglican), but one where the plot is primarily concerned with succession to power in a highly conservative (in both senses) community. Mrs. Carnock, an aged upper-class matriarch, and long the dominant force in the village of Colverton realises that she is dying, and is forced, in the absence of a better candidate to turn to Mr. Milend, a characterless lucky, as her successor. Milend is a "two time loser" a man whose misfortunes, Cregan seems at pains to stress,

are rooted in British Post-War history, and particularly in the "classless society" myth of New Britain. An ex-ironmonger, Milend traded his business in 1948 for the antique shop belonging to Mr. Dole, a hedonistic bisexual. Milend loses money and watches Dole's ironmongering business thrive in the subsequent years, and as a result labels himself "déclassé" (pp.31-32), as he is still thought of as the ironmonger, and antiques have "sold me down the river, socially" (p.31). Unfortunately for Mrs. Carnock, who is without offspring (more of that later), she wishes so desperately to keep the other political forces at bay that she plumps for Milend, a fellow Daily Telegraph enthusiast (pp.34-51), as the herald of her political vision. He is instructed to keep the town exactly as it is, "a monument to laissez-faire and sound common sense[.]. I don't want you getting boyish when I'm dead and building new schools or anything like that" (p.33). Not only is Milend to impose total stagnation against the tide of history upon the village, but he is also not to marry the spinster for whom he has an (unconsumed) passion, Miss Fisher, Mrs. Carnock consoling him with: "I got nothing from marriage that riding to hounds couldn't produce" (p.34). But Milend is an unhappy expediency, and has little will to fight the forces ranged against Carnock High Toryism. The chief threat comes from Father Pym. I am left wondering whether Pym's christian name is Francis. If it is not, it should be, for he is clearly a representative of the new "left-wing" conservatism of the sixties, of that generation following Butler. His motto is: "Father Pym, Missions to England, Anglican '66...glossing up the image while sticking to the party line. Bravo Malcolm Sargent, Basil Spence and Edward Heath" (pp.28-29). The destiny of Mrs. Carnock's vision is

threatened by Pym, but perhaps more so by the disunity of her own "cabinet", Milend, Miss Fisher, Reverend Swan and Mrs. Harrison (another local matriarch) who are unable to agree upon the weekend's proposed sermon, and finally have to be overruled by Mrs. Carnock, who flattens Miss Fisher's call for "democracy" (pp.16-20). In this introductory scene, we are also treated to the first of many conflicts of Carnockism with the "radical left", in this case Brother Dorman, an evangelist who roves Colverton and the surrounding Bedfordshire countryside, and in the tradition of that county, attacks the prevailing ethical and religious codes. Dorman, from off, yells a sermon against the decadence and spiritual impoverishment of Mrs. Carnock's outlook, making the unlikely comparison of Colverton to Sodom and Gomorrah, and Mrs. Carnock looks up from her prayer to remark "Private enterprise stimulates competition" (p.20). I will return to this fascinating play later, but it should also be noted that Cregan's later play, The Houses by The Green (1968)²⁸ portrays another struggle for succession, this time involving the human talisman (for this play is purely a farce, unlike Three Men for Colverton, a better play, and a more complex stylistic experiment, where scenes of high farce are built to by a series of minor comic climaxes). Susan, adopted daughter of the otherwise childless Jewish financier Molyneux, and heir to his considerable fortune, requires a husband to succeed, and is wooed by Molyneux (in disguise) and an old, ex-navy neighbour, the Commander. Both are gulled by Oliver, the young, wily, working class servant of the commedia dell'arte tradition, who went to Sussex University and is in line for a job with the Labour Party (p.10). It is he who finishes with the girl, leaving the old Tory Commander to lament his lack of

imagination ("my prayers are always to the status quo, that monstrous bum that sits on everything exciting, and under which tormented men like me nestle like old chickens"- pp.108-109). In Bennett's Forty Years On (1968) the wisdom of the Headmaster's stepping down to be succeeded by the progressive Franklin is always in question, and in Bond's Early Morning (1968), George's projected succession to Victoria's throne is rendered a very uncertain affair by his own obvious inability to rule and by his siamese twin Arthur, who is most reluctant to become involved. So too, in Mercer's And Did Those Feet? (1965) and Belcher's Luck (1966), and in Barnes' The Ruling Class (1968) the problem of either inadequate or unsuitable successors to an aristocratic and patently Tory position is central to the dramatic structure, but these will shortly be discussed in much greater detail.

Home's rise to power, then, was used to symbolise the decline of old Toryism, and of the older and more conservative institutions of British society as a whole. But what of the figure of Home himself? It is unsurprising, considering the astonishment with which Home's succession was greeted by the public, the press and a substantial section of the conservative party, that he would be made the object of a great deal of savage satire. Even before his accession, Home's Foreign Secretary post was too easy a target to resist. In Spike Milligan's The Bed Sitting Room (1963), the Lord Chamberlain took part in toning down the political satire on Home by specifying that "No representation of Lord Home's voice is allowed" in the play's performance. Milligan obliged, but struck back, by having a copy of the censor's letter, dated 31st January, 1963, reproduced in the book published by the BBC of the satirical

television series, That Was The Week That Was.²⁹ It was this television series, along with Swizzlewick, that led the assault upon Home which so aggrieves his biographer. Both of these programmes were screened in the run up to the 1964 general election; the latter, according to Young, attacked "God, Queen and country and the civilised decencies" by portraying "Conservative local councillors as pompous arrogant and corrupt."³⁰ It is through television too, that we find two black humourists satirising Home. The single excursion into the realm of black farce by Dennis Potter, Vote, Vote, Vote for Nigel Barton (1965)³¹ and David Mercer's And Did Those Feet? (1965)³² both contain extensive references to Home, whilst Mercer's stage plays The Governor's Lady (1965)³³ and Belcher's Luck (1966)³⁴ follow a similar pattern. What occurs in these plays is not merely a direct satirical attack upon the (by now) Leader of the Opposition, but a picture of the inanities of the old Toryism, where the conservatives concerned assume the salient characteristics of Home and his thought.

Potter's intentions in Vote, Vote, Vote for Nigel Barton are fairly well explained in the introduction he provides to the only edition:

In Vote, Vote, Vote for Nigel Barton I set out to write a comedy which had some purely farcical elements and some deliberately, even grotesquely, overdrawn comedy and yet which also appeared to return constantly to the ^{journalistic} norm of allegedly straightforward political reportage.³⁵

This seems to present Potter with the problem of integrating black farce and realism, whilst preserving thematic and structural unity. This was sometimes successfully achieved by

the writers of our study (as, for example, in The National Health) but was usually to some degree blighted by the inherent contradictions of the forms involved. The opening scenes of the play illustrate both the brilliance of Potter's grotesquerie and the play's limitations.

We are initially confronted with the figure of Sir Harry Blakerswood, the sitting conservative MP for the fictional constituency of West Barset, a safe conservative seat. Blakerswood is engaged in a traditional High Tory activity, the fox hunt. His horse falls, and his fellow sportspeople gather around:

FIRST WOMAN: Is the horse alright?

MAN: Just a few scratches, I think. But poor old Harry's had it by the looks of things.

SECOND WOMAN:(sniggers) Too much brandy in the stirrup cup.

MAN: He won't get over this. Look at his eyes rolling.

FIRST WOMAN:(agitated) Poor bloody horse. I blame Harry.

MAN: No, no. Harry's eyes. I'm talking about Harry. He's broken his neck.

SECOND WOMAN: Oh, I say. What ^{damned} a shame.

(They look at each other nervously and begin to giggle)

FIRST WOMAN: Let's help the horse.

MAN: Poor bloody horse!

FIRST WOMAN: Cut down in his prime." (scene 1, p.81)

This is followed by the face of a newsreader, who places the play into a very specific historical context by speaking of a visit to the United States Envoy by Harold Wilson and Michael Stewart, Wilson's Foreign Secretary in the early years of his

premiership. The newsreader is handed a late bulletin announcing the death of Sir Harry, and begins (after a brief obituary) to make the transition of the grotesque joke into the political world by adding "[sadly] His horse has also had to be shot" (p.282). There is then a zoom out to show the television newsreader on Nigel Barton's T.V. Nigel Barton, we learn, was the opponent of Blakerswood in the October election of 1964.

We are immediately put in mind of the contemporary situation, when Anne, Nigel's wife, expresses her malicious amusement at the idea that in the coming by-election, for the first time Nigel will be "tweedledee..not tweedledum", that is, government rather than opposition. This is the first, fairly direct reference to Alec Douglas-Home's political programme. He used the analogy of tweedledee and tweedledum often in his expression of the idea of consensus politics, whereby oppositions would escape from the trap of automatic hostility to the government, supporting governments where the opposition honestly agreed with policies, and opposing only when there was a genuine policy clash. This was a basic tenet of Home's leadership style,³⁶ and probably the logical extension of the "Butskellism" of past years. As scene three continues an even greater historical specificity is disclosed by the acknowledgement that the action takes place "about six months after the general election" (p.82). The placing of the play within this very precise historical moment (roughly, the present) seems to be Potter's most pressing expositional aim. His purpose in making it so becomes evident as the play proceeds. The remainder of scene three is taken up by Potter's sketching out of the nature of Barton's relationship with Anne, and the basic political conflict involved, that of his working-

class roots leading him to support a Labour government which does not really favour the working class. As Anne puts it: "For what [...] I'll tell you. Labour Colonial secretaries hobnobbing with corrupt old sheikhs, Labour defence ministers paying for polaris on the never-never, Harold being buddy-buddy with Lyndon. That's what for, Nigel. That's your Signpost for the sixties" (p.90). She accuses Nigel of "the worst form of betrayal" (p.98), and he attacks her middle class, rather too cerebral Marxism, which is, according to Nigel "more deeply upset by a bad review of a Brecht play than a Labour by-election defeat" (p.90). It is, to him "condescending Hampstead socialism [which] collapses at the first belch of wind from a navvy's guts" (p.112). The remainder of scene three is naturalistic, and constantly refers to contemporary events and personalities.

The contemporaneity of the play is constantly emphasised by references to Wilson and Home throughout, and provides the link between the black farce of the campaign, and the naturalistic scenes involving Nigel and Anne. As Potter "tightens the screws" on his audience, the references to Home, as portrayed by the Labour Party, become increasingly pointed, so that in scene 18 as the play's climax draws near, and Nigel comes face to face with his "hard left" constituency branch ("The more hopeless the chances of victory in any seat, the more pure the Party Member. Burke's Law!" comments Jack Hay - p.109) he gives a speech dismissing the previous administration of "scuttling aristocrats" (p.106). In scene 19 amidst the B movie deadpan dialogue between Nigel and Jack Hay, his cynical, right-wing agent, Hay comments of their chances: "I reckon that with any luck and a bit of the old sunshine and Sir Alec on the telly

on the eve of poll, we shall chop the Tory majority in half" (p.109), a barb which brings Home's inability to communicate with the electorate into the farce, possibly as a foreshadowing of the "speech-making climax" (Potter's phrase).³⁷

The momentum builds in a scene so black that it creates that moment that Orton so valued, in which an audience is forced to stop laughing at the sheer excess of horror. This scene, in an old people's home, where Hay stops just short of promising an old man a replacement for his lost leg in return for a Labour vote (22, pp.113-115), creates the essential lull in the action in preparation for the crucial scene 24. It is in this scene that the figure of Home and his individual political idiosyncracies become central to the play's final effect.

The scene (pp.116-123) presents the West Basset annual Local Council Dinner in which both Barton and his opponent, Captain Hugh Archibald-Lake, OBE, DSO, RN(ret'd) are invited to speak. The confrontation represents the fusing of the sub-plot with the grim farce of the campaign. Only in the previous "mirror image" scene (pp.92-95), a naturalistic section (the only campaign scene in which grotesquerie is not eminently visible) in which Anne condemns and Jack condones the slipperiness of Nigel's replies to a heckler at a rally (it is a flashback to the 1964 campaign), does Anne appear in a campaign scene. Our first sight of Archibald-Lake confirms that Potter has chosen to create a cartoon version of Home in Barton's opponent. There is only one stage direction which physically describes Archibald-Lake, this being that he peers at his audience over half-moon spectacles. The pair of half-moon spectacles worn by Alec Douglas-Home was the most prominent characteristic in public perceptions of Home, for they were

seized upon by cartoonists and lampoonists alike. Sir Alec himself ruefully admitted that "The best I could do for the cartoonists was my half-moon spectacles. Elizabeth [Douglas-Home] always said they cost me the 1964 election".³⁸ Archibald-Lake then proceeds to make a speech which, with one exception, could, point for point, have been a Home election speech. Archibald-Lake's delivery is poor - Potter describes it closely, as he times his jokes poorly, waits too long at his laughs and frequently fluffs his lines. Broadly the speech, as Barton remarks later, is a political bromide which greatly lacks character, and puts one in mind of The Times' review of Sir Alec's final solo television address at the 1964 election:

Sir Alec Douglas-Home played the final chords in the election television campaign last night. It proved to be a symphony in black and white played by a tone-deaf pianist, for although the notes were all there, and all in the right order, the performance was so totally lacking in style and emotion that its impact was lost on the ear.³⁹

This was far from the worst review of Alec Douglas-Home's public speaking, for his appalling delivery and notorious fluffing were very much a part of his reputation as a politician. Indeed, the infamous Swansea speech, of January 19th, 1963 has been dubbed, by at least one commentator, "perhaps the worst speech ever made by a British Prime Minister".⁴⁰ Archibald-Lake opens his speech by promising not to take up too much of his audience's time, a well worn ploy of Home's speeches. In his first speech in Commons as Prime Minister, he stated, as his knees literally trembled at the hostility of his reception,⁴¹ "I must not take up too much of the house's time", at which a confident

opposition taunted "Go on! Go on!"⁴² Archibald-Lake continues with the Home tactic of eschewing the confrontational element of opposition, and, in line with the tweedledee and tweedledum syndrome, takes the opportunity to damn the new government with the faint praise of being "all [...] honest, honourable, well-meaning and ^{reasonably} patriotic men". He goes on to speak of the need for national unity, and then strikes the only theme which does not accord with Home's particular form of conservatism as it was perceived at this time. He recalls an encounter with a local "Trade Union chappie" ("dratted nuisance he is at times, too"), who curses "some bilious alien or other" who has written an article attacking the monarchy. Archibald-Lake is moved by the remark that "the trouble with these blasted foreigners is that they don't understand our traditions". A number of Tory backbenchers had engaged in undisguised racism in attempting to win votes, a notable example being the notorious Smethwick campaign, in which the Conservative candidate Peter Griffiths was able to upset the sitting Labour member, Patrick Gordon-Walker, the shadow Foreign Secretary, by resorting to an activation of fear and racial hatred in the white population of the electorate, and "degrading politics", in the words of Harold Wilson, "to about the lowest level I've known in my lifetime". This was in response to Mr. Griffiths' local election slogan of "If you want a nigger neighbour vote Labour".⁴³ Earlier in the play a parody of the Smethwick affair occurs in a doorstep interview (pp.102-103). Home did not in fact encourage Griffiths, and chose to play the issue of race down.⁴⁴ It is of incidental interest that Griffiths' loudest condemnation came from Enoch Powell, who refused, along with Sir Edward Boyle, to speak in Smethwick.⁴⁵ The smear upon Home which occurs in the

scene we are discussing comes perhaps from a combination of Potter's desire to heap abuse upon the 14th Earl (He was, after all himself a defeated Labour candidate in the 1964 election)⁴⁶, and partially from his interpretation of Home's attitude to the African colonies.

Archibald-Lake winds down on a much more Home-ish note. He speaks, as did Sir Alec, of cricket and the ashes in expounding his policies,⁴⁷ mentions his son at Eton, and rounds off, provoked a little by Barton's sarcastic laughter with an attack on a final Home bugbear, the "assorted pornographers and seditious television playwrights" of the time. By the time he sits down, the audience has been subjected to a virtual catalogue of the mannerisms and beliefs which Home espoused within the Conservative Party.

The speech acts as the catalyst for the speech of angry disillusionment which follows from Nigel Barton. He makes the point "that all three parties are stuffed with aged tub thumpers and superannuated windbags. To most intelligent people, politics are synonymous with claptrap", a notion which in different words, is taken up again and again by dramatists of the generation and ilk that we are examining. Barton's speech becomes a point by point shattering of the Home clone's speech, and culminates in a passionate outburst about his own working-class origins. It is perhaps historically insensitive of Purser, who is alienated by almost two decades from the play's topicality, to lump the character of Archibald-Lake with the upper-class characters of Stand Up Nigel Barton (1965) as anachronistic,⁴⁸ but certainly the wild grotesquerie of Archibald-Lake is, for all its closeness to reality, a little at odds with Barton's speech. The disparate elements of lampoon

and social realism are not quite successfully brought together. Potter's own final judgement on the Tory character was that he was

too much of a parody or comic turn. I have heard Conservatives make fools of themselves in this way, but I now think that the whole scene would have been more effective if I had completely forgotten that I once wrote sketches for That Was The Week That Was.⁴⁹

It is a verdict with which one must concur, but it does not wholly discredit the effectiveness of much of the play's grim, farcical wit.

In Mercer's And Did Those Feet?, the examination of the British aristocracy and its decline is implicitly an examination of old Tory values, but what is perhaps more at issue is the more general idea of the loss of a sense of place in British society which was seen to occur in the old British upper-classes in the 'sixties. The reader will be unsurprised to find that I have discovered a number of parallels between Mercer's portrayal of Lord Fountain, and the popular image of Alec Douglas-Home. Fountain's central obsession with fathering an heir to his peerage other than the twins, Bernard and Timothy who were born outside wedlock to his working-class mistress, and who reject all attempts to force them to conform to upper-class norms, is central to the play, and will be discussed more completely later. For the moment, what is significant is that Fountain's near-sterility is frequently identified with his personality, which is described in precisely the terms that Home, as we have seen, has been described. Like a Home speech, Towser Griddle remarks that Fountain has "got the form, but not what you might call the content [Pause]. You two haven't got any

content" (he is speaking to Bernard and Timothy) (p.94). Of Bernard and Timothy, the complaint is repeated as they are described, in the final "ritual" scene as characterless nonentities by Laura, Timothy's fiancée (p.136). All this brings to mind Alec Douglas-Home, whose public image is reflected in Cecil King's diary, which remarks, shortly after his resignation as Conservative leader in late July, 1965:

I have never been able to detect anything in him at all. He is a pleasant country gentleman of a very familiar type. I agreed with those who greeted his appointment to the Foreign Office with derision, and his nomination at 10 Downing Street with stupefaction. When he became PM he asked me to lunch alone and I had one and a half hours with him. Neither then, nor earlier, nor since, have I been able to catch a glimpse of anything .⁵⁰

Lord Fountain had the physical characteristics of Home, including skin "Like a mouldy wash leather" (p.117), a facial characteristic remarked upon by commentators at Home's television appearances. There is possibly also a rather pointed remark about Britain's most prominent aristocrat's earlier career when Lord Fountain remarks "I offered them [Bernard and Timothy] something in the Foreign Office. I've still got me influence, y'know. They turned it down. My family's put its idiots in the Foreign Office for generations" (p.105). Whether or not Fountain's involvement with Nazi generals during the Second World War is intended to implicate Home's appeasement background is debatable, but certainly, if not, this is a satirical attack upon the aristocracy's general wartime associations with Nazism.

Mercer's Belcher's Luck leaves me in two minds, as the play is not really a comedy at all, but a dark, ritualistic drama of the kind characterised in our era by Rudkin's Afore Night Come. I have decided to include the play in our discussion on the grounds that much of the play's dialogue and action is clearly intended to be seen as grimly, cynically comical. The character of Sir Gerald Catesby is one that possibly draws something from Home's image in the frailness of his constitution. Catesby is a man in a position of authority whose health does not, and indeed has never (not even as a young army officer) backed his position. He is something of a weak character, who is often forced to back down from his political posturing. But it is in his outlook, rather than his physical presence that Catesby most clearly resembles Home. Like Home⁵¹, Catesby's christianity is the basic source of all of his political actions and societal beliefs. Catesby is also a Tory aristocrat of a progressive outlook, something which is also true of Lord Fountain (And Did These Feet? - p.136). But like Home (who was never, for all of his struggling, able to credibly present himself as a man of the future) and Fountain, Catesby is ultimately unable to come to terms with the technological and social advances that he so energetically endorses. "I approve of progress", he says, "but detest its consequences" (p.16).

One thing which is notable amongst the black comedies of the period 1964 to 1974 is the preoccupation of British dramatists with the British themselves. Rarely does the dramatist venture outside of Britain in location, whilst

foreign figures within the plays are normally incidental and cartoonist implements of exposition like Aly, the slothful Pakistani in *Living's' Eh?*, the stereotypical Jerry, Hare's drunken buffoon Australian in his *The Great Exhibition*,⁵² or Claire, Mercer's relentlessly aggressive American in *After Haggerty*. The exceptions to this rule of obsession with the British (and generally, the English) at home occur in those plays which portray the aristocracy at work. Whatever the truth about the hard-nosed business men in pre-Victorian India, the empire, in the public mind, was associated with figures such as Lord Home. The last openly pro-white minority rule Foreign Secretary, Home was associated with his remark that the Africans had not invented the wheel upon white colonisation,⁵³ made during the 1964 election campaign. After his resignation as leader, he became shadow foreign secretary, representing sympathetically a substantial minority of the Tory right in attacking Wilson's Rhodesian UDI policy, and finally became Foreign Secretary under Heath, with special dispensation to mend fences with white southern Africans.⁵⁴ It is worth noting that Home and his ilk were, within the Conservative Party, not representative of the prevailing anti-apartheid views, as represented by Tory meritocrats such as Macleod and Boyle, so it was the landed and upper class Tory, of the kind frequently found in the colonies who were associated specifically in the public mind with the Empire mentality. This was not lost upon the writers of black comic satire.

In *The Governor's Lady*,⁵⁵ David Mercer makes concrete this association of the old style Tory with the colonies by adventurously locating his play in an ex-British colony in Africa, recently granted independence. Lady Harriet Boscoe,

the widow of the Governor General, Sir Gilbert Boscoe, lives in a remote region of Karalinga, an obscure fictional ex-colony. A brief introductory scene with a fellow white woman provides a profile of the old colonial attitudes exemplified by Britain's former Prime Minister. The childless Harriet sees the natives of the country as children, unable to govern themselves, and fears the effect of the new Labour government "at home", which she sees in the same light as Attlee's government, having no more recent grasp of their policies. In this expository scene we are acquainted through her visitor Charmaine with the fact of Harriet's insanity. She will not believe that her husband has been dead for six months, nor that Karalinga has been independent for a year. Harriet believes that now is the time for Karalinga to decide between "us and those awful little demagogues of theirs with a degree from Manchester or wherever it is" (p.9). Moscow, as her native servant later points out, is in fact a more influential university in the country (p.13), and the choice has in fact already been made.

Having firmly established that Lady Harriet is suffering from delusions, Mercer introduces us to the late Sir Gilbert, as we see him through Harriet's eyes, in fact a wild gorilla who has come in from the surrounding jungle. It is upon this single misapprehension that the humour of the play finally rests. As Harriet speaks of the civilised decencies, a paragon of refinement, Sir Gilbert, in full Governor General's regalia, belches, farts, salivates, eats bananas insatiably, vomits and breaks up the furniture. The farcical buffo of ironic lines between the two (GILBERT: [while sitting on top of the wardrobe and salivating] But you wouldn't think I'm an uncultured man, would you, Harriet (p.19) - HARRIET: I have never known you to

lose control of yourself in forty years of government service" - p.20) begins to give way to a more serious self-questioning. As the play progresses, Gilbert's misdemeanours become increasingly anti-social, as do his pronouncements upon the colony. He is, of course, a sounding board for Harriet's disordered mind. He first holds up for criticism those who have marginalised Gilbert and Harriet's class:

'Law and order. Nowadays it's all, wha' do they call it? Pragmatism. Oh, there are people who regard me as a sort of living [!] fossil! I know. I'm an enemy of pragmatism, you see. And it doesn't do these days, Harriet.

and finally advocates their murder:

Since we are virtually an extinct class...since we've let the merchants and managers and technicians capture the roost...we might as well go out with a bang! (p.39)

Again and again Gilbert expresses logical extensions of Harriet's own views. Her point about the natives' inability to govern themselves is appended by Gilbert the gorilla with the remark that "they ought to get back up the trees, where they belong" (p.25). Gilbert finally quips his way through the murder of Amolo and the rape of Harriet, before she shoots him in revenge and dies of a heart attack as a consequence.

The play brings together a number of common themes of the day. The colonial upper class is portrayed as insane, and clinging to a glorious, mythologised past, with an obsessive concern for its own inability to produce issue combined with a related dark sense of sexual guilt and fear. Civilised values, the height of the civilisation itself in terms of the class structure, is invariably juxtaposed with the capacity of those

who extol and represent such values to move quickly to violence and degradation.

Simon Gray's Sleeping Dog (1967)⁵⁶ also opens in a former African colony, but Gray's television play format allows him to switch naturalistically from the colony, Kibbobola, in flashback, to modern Britain, where the central figure, Sir Hubert, is settling in his retirement. No form of adjustment is manifest in Sir Hubert's treatment of the black population of Britain from that of Kibbobola, because he sees the black population as quite literally, the same. He suffers from a similar delusion to that of Lady Harriet, but Gray is less adventurous in presenting it, since we frequently see the West Indians who Sir Hubert encounters first through his eyes as feathered natives in Zulu style attire, then from the camera's "objective" viewpoint as average British citizens (p.22). The effect of this, Gray specifies, "~~should be both comic and sinister~~" (p.16). Sir Hubert peppers his recollections with tales of his dedication to a firm control of the natives of the former colony and the maintenance of law and order by being able to see through native deceptions. But his ability to penetrate motives is seen as another egoistic delusion, for he misinterprets his wife's frequent visits to the West Indian hotel barman, Claud, as evidence of an affair. It is in fact a manifestation of his wife's alcoholism which she successfully conceals from Sir Hubert, but no one else. A deep sense of sexual fear is awoken in Sir Hubert, who is already given to elaborate flights of fancy about the motives of negroes (as is evinced by his farcical constructions upon a newspaper story about a child's abduction by a man who may not even be black, but is seen as black by the ageing judge - pp.38-41) and he takes action against

Claud by luring him to his country retreat and imprisoning him in the basement. He forces Claud to sign a baroque confession of sexual infidelity with his wife, carefully constructing it with the terrified barman at the point of a gun, to suit his own fantasy of native behaviour, and of his wife's frustration, which derives from the childless couple's seeming lack of sexual contact (pp.60-62, and pp.64-67). The irony is that Claud is homosexual, and a secret associate of Sir Geoffrey, Sir Hubert's friend at the Foreign Office (p.42). Sir Hubert keeps Claud locked up and chained to the wall in his cellar, and at the close of the play is noted to have restored his sense of balance (p.72), a perverse restoration of order where Claud is kept as a dog by Sir Hubert and Lady Caroline, and it is hinted, even performs sexual favours for the Lady of the house (pp.71-72).

Cruel and uncivilised behaviour is the order of the day here, as it is in And Did Those Feet?, where Lord Fountain's "lust for legal progeny was manic and unproductive" (p.89), his insanity leading to another manifestation of a disturbed mind -- this time God speaking to Fountain in his own voice (p.117), the ultimate manifestation of ego, instructing him to exact a cruel ritual revenge upon Bernard and Timothy, tragically bastards, as a result of his only dalliance with the working class. In And Did Those Feet?, as in Sleeping Dog, the cage is used as a heavy-handed symbol of repression and arrestment of progress by the upper classes (p.134).⁵⁷ Mercer's parallel characters, Lord Fountain, Sir Gerald Catesby and Sir Gilbert Boscoe all give virtually the same speech, about filial patronage and the need of a few great families to control the land, but each of these three is without legitimate issue and come to violent ends for reasons closely bound up with their quest for a continuation of

their respective lineages.

In The Little Mrs. Foster Show (1968)⁵⁸ Livings returns us to another fictional African ex-colony, where an (as usual) childless upper middle class English woman is seeking enlightenment in a war-torn country, to which she proposes to lend her limited skills in aid - another gesture of imperial paternalism. She too is driven mad, when her attempts at procreation lead her into a barren marriage with a selfish working-class English mercenary, Sergeant Hook. In The Houses by The Green,⁵⁹ Cregan's upper class commander has a safe existence in his house which is protected by "interests in the House of Lords" (p.13), but is frustrated by his lack of progeny, and attempts to redress this situation by his increasingly elaborate disguises, by which he attempts to woo his neighbour's daughter. The strain, he declares, affects his sanity (p.13), which is eventually declared by Oliver, his working class servant, to have collapsed altogether when Oliver's success with Susan leaves him without wife or issue (p.109).

The usurping of an old order by a new meritocratic society is dealt with most uncritically in this group of plays, especially in the period before and shortly after Wilson's re-election in 1966, with a substantial, rather than wafer-thin, majority. This seems to have been because the replacement of the new ways by the old Edwardian establishment was thought possible by a substantial section of society, the playwrights evidently among them. This led to a kind of uneasy revue sketch style of satire, such as that in Vote, Vote, Vote for Nigel Barton. In Mercer's three plays, particularly, the image of a small and deluded group of families clinging desperately to a

mythic past and attempting to stave off progress whilst seeming to welcome it, is recurrent. Home himself is conjured up by Fountain, in the reworking, to Home's disadvantage of his most famous riposte of the 1964 election campaign, one which won him some public acclaim⁶⁰:

FOUNTAIN: My family, doctor, was begetting Barons
when yours was still in burrows

DOCTOR: And I have no doubt, Lord Fountain, that my
family will continue to beget ordinary citizens when
yours is extinct (p.99).

This amounts to little more than the put-down one wishes one could have thought of at the time of the dinner party, enacted some days later, in fantasy, to one's own advantage. Mercer is not quite able to let stand even this minor flurry of wit from his slightly fictionalised adversary. The whips and cages of Towser Griddle (and, for that matter, of Sir Hubert) are also overstated, in their context. At the end of a blithely spiteful play, Mercer cannot resist piling on a sense of pathos through the characters of Bernard and Timothy, in order to further degrade Lord Fountain, which they cannot possibly sustain because of their two dimensional nature, and because no audience sympathy was created from them earlier. In order to prove his case that Lord Fountain deserves his murder, Mercer is prepared to undercut the earlier tone of the play with a sentimental ending, giving the boys their wish of an unlikely jungle pastoral world as a reward for their rejection of Fountain's values. But these two were not themselves free from spite earlier in the play, and cannot credibly carry off the implausible diminuendo.

In The Governor's Lady, the implication that the

aristocracy are less civilised and more violent than the rest of us because they pass wind, leaves one wondering precisely as to what Mr. Mercer's own definition of civilisation amounts. Quite aside from stepping over the narrow line which separates satiric vitriol from gratuitous abuse, Mercer is unable to keep to a single style in dealing with his central characters. The play presents an early "strong drama" potential, with an expository scene providing the scenario of a deluded woman alone in a remote place among possibly hostile servants, reminding one a little of Miss Julie, but is replaced by Carry On Up The Jungle upon the entrance of Sir Gilbert in the following scene. Then, as Gilbert abandons flatulence in favour of homicide, Mercer begins to abandon the thread of satiric comedy altogether and return to strong drama, suggesting the same uneasy compromise between realism and black farce which so flawed Potter's play. Mercer does not seem to have the faith in his comedy to carry through his satiric and political thrust to a comic end. He is perhaps unable to sustain the air of detachment required for this kind of humour, and so resorts to what he considers stronger stuff in delivering his dénouement. Belcher's Luck is also a blend of techniques, but is a more successful play, in my view, because of its greater thematic complexity. We see for ourselves the opposing, modern forces which threaten the aristocrat and which are only spoken of in the earlier plays, whilst Sir Gerald is an altogether more psychologically fleshed-out character, and is therefore better able to carry off scenes of naturalistic drama than a mere comic grotesque.

I have singled out Mercer's plays as he is self evidently more preoccupied with this theme than most, but there is a

general tendency amongst dramatists mentioned to simplify, to an alarming degree, the issues at stake. The idea of the universal sterility of the aristocracy is, of course, a way of making concrete the withering on the vine of their own capacity to govern, their loss of power in the new world, the making concrete of a political idea. Their insanity seems to be an attempt to disabuse audiences of a popular notion of the aristocracy, making their loveable eccentricity into a dangerous psychosis. The farcical fear of sexual contact is also emblematic of an upper class inextricably cut off from the general populace and without hope of adaptation, which should represent the chief salvation of these characters. But in identifying these themes, burlesque is the most frequent device used by black comedians, and it is used more freely and saliently than in the portrayal of any other stereotypes of the period. The form of farce used is buffo, in effect, relying upon the characters' enslavement to their own bodies, be it by sex, alcohol, or for that matter, farting, but it has little intellectual depth and is much more geared to visual imagery through the use of props (cages, guns, chains and so forth) and costume (native headress, formal regalia, elaborate disguise) than the more intellectual farces of the period, which concentrate as much on disparities of word and deed, of the hypocrite revealed than do this group of plays. It is after all, much funnier to reveal a radical as a secret reactionary, than to expose a deluded reactionary, who is at heart, a deluded reactionary. The humour surrounding the political beliefs of these upper-class characters is derived mainly from extending their proclamations to their logical, extreme conclusions, as Sir Gilbert does with Harriet, or Mrs. Foster, in her insanity,

does with her final gesture of buying everyone on stage with wads of money which have been stuffed into her costume (which falls apart revealing naked, but aged flesh and symbolically soiled underclothes) rather than by influencing them as such women are expected to, by their position in the social hierarchy (pp.99-100).

The unease about the aristocracy began to die down by the time of Wilson's re-election, but flared again around the issue of the powers of hereditary peers in the House of Lords. Wilson's election manifesto of 1966 had included a reference to the reform of the House of Lords, to the extent that the upper house would be unable to "frustrate delay or defeat government legislation",⁶¹ but as usual, he failed to carry this policy through, despite unease about such powers from the liberal press⁶² and about the potential of such MPs as Michael Foot to oppose such reforms, should they be put into a bill⁶³. This debate was considerably widened when a succession of liberal reforms were blocked or amended by the Lords, who became increasingly restive after David Steel's abortion reforms.⁶⁴ By this time Wilson was moved to action, and despatched John Silkin and Richard Crossman to draw up possible legislation which would work along the lines of abolishing the voting powers of hereditary peers and establishing a majority commensurable to that of the government of the day amongst life peers, by allowing any incoming Prime Ministers to appoint life peers of their own parties after each election. This was opposed by Foot on the grounds that it would increase Prime Ministerial patronage to an unacceptable level

and that it would provide legitimacy for an institution which should in any case be abolished altogether. This division caused disruption in the left which is detailed painfully by Crossman, and would go on for some time. The controversy came to a head in the summer of 1968 when the Lords, under Lord Salisbury, united to defeat Wilson's proposed sanctions (which had been demanded by the UN) against Rhodesia.⁶⁵ A very public condemnation ensued⁶⁶ and Wilson pushed hard for reforms. Despite Enoch Powell's claim that the Lords were supported by the average working man in the country, ⁶⁷^{they} were shown to be unpopular by contemporary public opinion polls, which showed 70 per cent of people questioned favouring the abolition or reform of the upper house, and only 19 per cent favouring its retention without change ⁶⁸. Even within the House of Lords itself there was "an awareness of a growing popular enthusiasm which may turn into something quite nasty, they feel, unless it is accommodated".⁶⁹ It had already been pointed out that there was a massively disproportionate representation (1 Communist, 40 Liberals, 100 Labour and 350 Conservatives)⁷⁰ in favour of Conservative life peers, but the addition of the aristocracy and hereditary peers made this disproportion absurd, since there were, at recent estimate,⁷¹ 962 of these with eligible votes, and nowhere was it argued that they should be anything but overwhelmingly Tory. Against such people, Crossman noticed "a rising tide of popular indignation against the House of Lords, which had now proved itself a reactionary body, worthy only of total abolition. Not a very bright prospect for our reform",⁷² and by November the debate became one which fixed upon such elements as the irrelevance of the House of Lords' ceremonial functions and its general undemocraticness.⁷³ But despite

popular opinion, and the support of both front benches in the Commons, it became increasingly clear that the legislation would founder. By December 1968, Crossman would face press conferences which questioned the will of Commons to carry through the legislation. Despite his reassurances ⁷⁴ the legislation was eventually shelved in April 1969 after wrecking tactics by backbenchers on both sides of the House. Supporters of the bill were described as "half hearted" whilst its attackers were "convinced, determined and in some cases passionate".⁷⁵ Crossman reflected that the support was in any case restricted only to members of Commons who looked forward to a place in the upper house at some later date, and gloomily remarked that, combined with the other great backbench defeat of leadership of that year, the overturning of In Place of Strife,

the reputation of the Wilson administration, and of government generally, had suffered its greatest setback of the sixties.⁷⁶ All of this created a great deal of public scrutiny of the aristocracy, reopening the earlier debate about their role in society, and particularly about the societal health of an upper chamber which was dominated by a class perceived as reactionary and anachronistic.⁷⁷ ^{This} added popularity to such books as that cited earlier (Sinclair's) a work which purports to be about the decline of the aristocracy the world over, but puts aside most of its second half to criticise the contemporary British aristocracy.

At the height of the political debate, in November 1968, as the political battle lines were being drawn up and it became apparent that Parliament would be unable to rid itself of its unelected chamber, a black farce about the aristocracy which culminates, inevitably, in the House of Lords, added a striking

satiric voice to the ongoing debate. It is a play laden with contemporary references and political in-jokes. It was also the first black comedy to force contemporary critics to do what they had studiously avoided doing, despite the politicality of earlier plays, in declaring a political position as part of their contemporary assessment of the play.

Peter Barnes' The Ruling Class,⁷⁸ opens with a toast at an upper class banquet, which is proposed by the aged judge, the 13th Earl of Gurney, a parody (the first of many) of John of Gaunt's in Richard II, bringing contemporary paranoias into the patriotism:

This teeming womb of privilege, this feudal state,
Where shores beat back the turbulent sea of foreign
anarchy.

This ancient fortress still commanded by the noblest
Of our Royal blood; this ancient land of ritual.

This precious stone set in a silver sea (p.7)

The speech brings in three central ideas of the play -patrician suspicion of foreigners, the prominence of the upper classes at the controls of power, and the importance of ritual and the "civilised" tradition in the maintenance of such an autocracy. The Earl is next seen at home with his 104 year-old retainer, Tucker, to whom he announces his intention to marry. He faces a problem which by now would be familiar to a contemporary audience, that of his lack of a successor, his only surviving heir being Jack, who is obscurely alluded to as unsuitable. The 13th Earl decides upon Lord Fountain's solution of impregnating the lower classes in order to guarantee fertility, by marrying an actress, Miss Grace Shelley,⁷⁹ who is of "good breeding stock. Family foals well. Sires mostly" (p.9). The 13th Earl

relaxes by engaging in an absurd, sado-masochistic ritual, dressing up in a ballet tutu, three-cornered hat and sword, and placing a silk noose about his neck. This sexual activity proves fatal, as he accidentally hangs himself (pp.9-11).

All this seems to be an allusion to the long buried Profumo Affair, which exercised such influence among the dramatists of black comedy, especially in the use of a High Court judge, since at the inception of the affair it was they who bore the brunt of the allegations and rumours as to their sexual practices.⁸⁰ It was also a Judge, Lord Hailsham, who attracted much attention by seeing fit to deny that it had been he who had been the man concerned in two of the fruitier rumours which this affair caused to surface,⁸¹ and by then turning upon his own party and parliament generally over Profumo, thereby earning for himself the reputation of the most censorious moralist in the land.⁸² Indeed, the legal profession seemed as much implicated by the affair as any other, being criticised for hypocrisy on all sides, and being in the end the branch of the establishment to whom judgement on a matter which did not appear inherently litigious would fall, through the trials of Ward, Keeler and the others and the Denning report, which attempted, unsuccessfully on the whole, to close the lid on the whole affair. Indeed in one review of the play, a still more contemporary scandal is alluded to as Barnes' source.⁸³ The scene in any case makes for a brilliant Profumoesque prologue. It leads into a clever first scene in which Sir Charles Gurney, the city financier and half brother of the late Earl, along with Bishop Lampton⁸⁴ (the third pillar of the old establishment) an in-law, explain, retrospectively, the very plausible and perfectly respectable reasons for the 13th Earl's bizarre

attire when found dead, an increasingly inventive piece of farcical cover up which is entirely static and verbal, setting the scene nicely for the more physical business which will increasingly overwhelm the action (pp.16-17).

The 13th Earl's death brings about the accession of the 14th Earl (it would not have escaped a contemporary audience's attention that Alec Douglas-Home was also the 14th Earl) and we are immediately acquainted with the problem about Jack which had earlier been eliptically put. Jack is in fact a bearded monk, a long haired hippy (p.27), who cites amongst those who have influenced him in locating his particular identity as "Tim O'Leary, the Jewish Buddha" (p.26). He believes himself to be the saviour, and professes peace and love as the only motivating forces in his life. This delusion, according to Dr. Herder, the corrupt psychiatrist, has occurred as a result of "being brutally rejected by his mother and father at the age of eleven. They sent him away, alone, into a primitive community of licensed bullies and pederasts. SIR CHARLES: You mean he went to a Public School" (p.24).

Finding themselves unable to exercise guardianship because of a clause in the will, the family watch helplessly as Jack takes over the house, dispensing wishes of love to two visiting Tory ladies with such intensity that they run from the house in fear. Returning to the theme of the barrenness of the aristocracy, the family plot an immediate marriage of Jack to Grace Shelley, disguising her as Margueritte Guatier (to whom the 14th Earl believes himself married) and convincing him to "remarry" her. After the conception of a child, Dr. Herder decides upon a strong course of therapy for Jack in order to "cure" him of his delusions of universal love by confronting him

with another man who believes himself to be the Godhead. A violent confrontation occurs and Jack has an expressionistically presented breakdown. Barnes creates a memorable theatrical metaphor, by bringing on an eight feet tall hairy monster with a "face like a gigantic guinea-pig, it is dressed incongruously in High Victorian fashion: Morning-coat and top hat" (p.73) which beats and throws down the 14th Earl, and finally having brutalised him terribly "raises its hat, grunts and lurches out the way it came in". This is the most striking representation yet of the brutality of the civilised, of the dog beneath the skin of the aristocracy, a representation extended to its ultimate logic, of the gorilla in regalia, and of the cages and whips of the earlier plays. The brutality of the civilised world having laid waste to the earlier dreams of peace and love, Jack ends the scene, and the first act, repeating, for the first time, his real name. In the same cathartic scene the baby of Jack and Grace has been born, whilst Sir Charles' son Dinsdale, having long looked forward to becoming the local conservative MP (p.33) finally announces "Super news! Old Barrington-Cochrane's dying. It'll mean a by-election" (p.71). This creates the impetus for a second act in which the political theme will increase in prominence.

The second act opens with the baptism of Vincent, the new Earl's baby son, and the Gurneys commenting upon Jack's recovery. Dinsdale initially awaits the by-election with some trepidation about his cousin's recovery (p.78), but Jack soon proves to be a pillar of the establishment, participating in shooting (pp.81-89), making speeches on the importance of hanging and flogging, and going through his examination by the

Master of Lunacy without any problems by singing a chorus of the Eton boating song with him (pp.85-87). In fact Jack has changed very little, concealing from the family the fact that he is to be an old testament style divinity: "I AM GOD. Not the God of love but God Almighty. God the Law-Giver, chastiser and judge" (p.90). Adopting the pop cultural interpretation of Jack the Ripper's costume of long black cape and silvertop cane (p.103), Jack becomes a homicidal maniac murdering first Lady Claire and finally Lady Grace Gurney with no apparent impediment from those around him, despite the fact that he is the obvious suspect. Finally the 14th Earl announces his intention to take his seat in the House of Lords as part of a campaign, of which Dinsdale is the Gurney representative in the Commons, to bring back capital punishment and flogging. After giving his most violent display of insane verbal incontinence so far in his most ritually significant costume (his full parliamentary robes - p.116) Jack makes his debut speech in the House of Lords, carrying all before him in a condemnation of the immorality of the times which leaves the other noble Lords cheering and waving their order papers, as Sir Charles looks on with the remark "He's one of us at last" and Dinsdale adds a sinister premonition of future power for the 14th Earl: "Bravo! Bravo! You see father, he's capable of anything!" (p.118).

The Ruling Class is in fact a closely observed burlesque of a play of a generation before by William Douglas-Home, The Chiltern Hundreds (1947).⁸⁵ Lord Home's brother had based his play on his own family experience, particularly that of his brother Alec, whose experiences as a defeated candidate in the 1929 election at Coatbridge and Airdrie, and then again in the General election of 1945, formed the background material for the

play.⁸⁶ It opens on General Election day 1945, where Tony, son of Lord Lister, is standing as a Conservative candidate for the seat around Lister Castle, which has been held by a member of the Lister family for generations. He is however shocked to lose his seat (like Lord Home) to a local Labour candidate. In disillusionment Tony cynically becomes a Labour candidate when Cleghorn, the man who has defeated him, is sent to the House of Lords by Attlee, in order to create a cabinet minister in the Lords. At the ensuing by-election Tony stands, to his chagrin, against Beecham, the family butler who intends to re-establish Tory ascendancy, and is once again defeated. Beecham then, having made his point, brings in the Chiltern Hundreds, resigning to become once again, the family butler. During the play there are lengthy romantic intrigues, with Tony, having newly acquired his *déclassé* image, abandoning his American fiancée, June, for the housemaid, Bessie. Cleghorn marries Lady Caroline, Lord Lister's spinster sister, who is introduced to the plot for that purpose. Beecham finally marries Bessie after Tony abandons her to take up with June again, having been returned to his senses by his electoral defeat. All this is observed by Lord Lister as the "innocent" required of farce with bemusement and astonishment, which causes much of the play's farcical humour. A.E. Matthews created the role, and repeated it in the Ealing Film of the play two years later.

The farce, then, presents a traditional temporary reversal of the social order which is reasserted safely after much comic comeuppance, primarily to Tony. Although the play is rather gently satiric to both sides of the political spectrum ("These politicians", observes Lady Lister, "never say anything they mean. They put them straight in prison if they do. And so



they never do" - p.11) there is no doubt that Labour bears the brunt of the satire, through "that dreadful [...] self made Mr. Cleghorn", whom Lady Lister calls a "mountebank" (p.21). Cleghorn, once promoted to the Lords (a great deal is made of the fairness of this institution as Cleghorn first attacks it, then suddenly accepts its usefulness after he is kicked upstairs - pp.33-35) becomes aware of his status to such an extent that he begins to despise people from his origins such as Bessie, who he calls "vulgar" and "common" (p.56). Whenever Cleghorn, the professional politician, debates politics with Lord Lister, he is beaten pointless by the eccentric old amateur, and his supporters are seen as vandals, chalking slogans on the family car, which has been borrowed by Beecham for the campaign (p.57). Finally then, the play is about the security offered by the old order, by everyone knowing their positions in the social hierarchy. For all the fun of seeing Bessie act the Lady of the House and Lady Lister having to don the maid's apron (p.58), there is little doubt that Beecham will in the end heed the advice offered by new Lord Cleghorn, that like any "professional", he can't do a politician's job, and that "A man who has got a place in life should keep it" (p.66), just as Bessie knows that money and power, deep down, are not the things that count (p.26). The pairing-off of each of the obvious socially suited partners at the resolution represents a very Tory form of happy ending.

The Chiltern Hundreds was an ideal Ealing film in its political spirit. Being mildly anarchic but conservative in nature, the play epitomised Michael Balcon's assessment of the political attitudes of Ealing:

"The bloodless revolution of 1945 had taken place [...],

the country was tired of regulations and regimentation and there was a mild anarchy in the air. In a sense our comedies were a reflection of this mood....a safety valve for more anti-social impulses".⁸⁷

Its proximity to the actual life of Lord Home's family also made the play perfect for satiric attack. Barnes, as a cinema critic⁸⁸, would have surely been familiar with this exalted piece of British cinema and is able to turn upon its head almost every point made by The Chiltern Hundreds, giving each major character in Home's play an equal character in social station in his own. Lord Lister, the loveable eccentric, is matched by the 13th Earl of Gurney, a slippery old lunatic and sex pervert to boot. Beecham, the loyal Tory butler, more conservative than his aristocratic employers, who spends his life making life perfect for "those who made this country what it is, I mean of course, the British aristocracy" (p.19) is replaced by Tucker, who has only one driving belief, his hatred of his masters, and who is, in truth,

Alexei krondstadt. Number 243. Anarchist - Trotskyist - Revolutionary. I'm a cell! All these years I've been working for the revolution, spitting in the hot soup, peeing on the Wedgewood dinner plates (p.31)

There is also the young son, Tony, whose employment, aside from that of an MP, is problematic, and who, like Lord Home⁸⁹ contemplates running his father's estate when things go wrong (p.68). Dinsdale, the bright young thing and prospective Tory MP of The Ruling Class is in no such position, since Sir Charles will not allow the boy near the family finances on the grounds of his imbecility (p.37). Lady Molly Lister is turned into the

casually and incestuously promiscuous Lady Claire Gurney, the commonsensical practicality of the former character altered to the all-knowing manipulativeness of the latter. The cross-class marriage theme is also taken up in The Ruling Class, but this time it becomes the only means of procreation for a barren and decadent class. The only source of comfort for Sir Charles, the 13th and the 14th Earls of Gurney is the working-class trouper, Grace Shelley. Whilst Lady Claire's allegiance, until her ill-fated attempt to seduce her nephew, is with the non-aristocratic Dr. Herder. Instead of momentary misalliances, these relationships, especially that between Jack and Grace, present the only source of stability to the disaffected and violent aristocrats of The Ruling Class. Even the most memorable comic business of The Chiltern Hundreds, that of Lord Lister's shooting, which he frequently attempts from the drawing-room window (as did the 13th Earl of Home)⁹⁰ is turned into a particularly distasteful image. Instead of endearing craziness, the blood sport of Jack is presented as dangerous instability, as Jack shoots, not a fox, like Lord Lister, but a dove, a poacher, and very nearly Tucker into the bargain (pp.82-83). The practical and modern picture of the House of Lords which is presented around Clegthorpe's accession to peerage is contrasted with the shocking and decadent abuse of democracy which occurs at the end of The Ruling Class.

What makes The Ruling Class so much more powerful than the less complete earlier satires is the totality of Barnes' vision, his preparedness to consider the aristocracy, however grotesquely, as a part of a broader vision of society. "The Barnes controversy", as Dukore puts it,⁹¹ a situation which has led to enormous division between many eminent critics, began

with this play. On one side can be included Martin Esslin, Sir Harold Hobson and Ronald Bryden, who all see Barnes as an authentic genius, whilst on the other there are such respected names as Hilary Spurling, Benedict Nightingale and Bernard Levin, from whom can be heard such phrases as "a monumental and tasteless bore" in describing the play.⁹² Part of the problem, I think, was the fact that critics were asked to confront the political nature of Barnes' work. Some critics, Hinchliffe among them, claim that Barnes is "mainly interested in verbal fireworks", and avoid the politicality of The Ruling Class altogether⁹³ whilst others address the play with hostility on its own terms. Nightingale, for example, brings in one of the playwrights dealt with earlier in his discussion of the political implications of the farce:

I've had occasion before - apropos Denis Potter, I believe - to question the relevance of such assaults. Isn't it rather self-indulgent to rail against country nobs, a politically insignificant minority, when a revived Right will clearly depend on much wider support and be open to subtler, more insidious influences?⁹⁴

Similarly, Spurling brings in Bond's The Narrow Road to the Deep North to her attacks on The Ruling Class:

one must assume that the play's attraction lies in its absolutely stock responses to all those topics - empire, blood sports, piety, class, etc, for they are by no means confined to Mr. Bond - on which whimsical derision is a powerful token of respectability in playwrights⁹⁵

Nightingale, himself a reviewer for the New Statesman of 1969

and therefore a desperate upholder of the view that Wilson had swept away all of the old class barriers, later accuses Barnes of "an attack on a Britain that doesn't exist anymore".⁹⁶

On the other side, there were critics such as Hammond, who called The Ruling Class "a profound and inventive attack on toryism and the way it has blighted the life of Britain for centuries past".⁹⁷ Irving Wardle remarks that "stripped to the bone, Peter Barnes' theme is the violence sanctioned by right-wing tradition".⁹⁸ It is Barnes himself who puts the issue into focus:

Class hatred's there because class is a total force in England, and in a different way to most western societies. To say that one is blinkered because one hates class distinction is to get the problem arse upwards, in the sense that only by hating it do we try to get rid of it; you don't get rid of it any other way than by attacking it.⁹⁹

His plays, one must note, take issue not with the aristocracy, but the notion of class itself, especially as it is manifested in Britain - the decaying aristocracy is a symptom of a British problem, not the whole thing. Barnes enters the territory of R.W. Johnson, in his essay on "the Tory culture",¹⁰⁰ the idea that in British political culture, with its class structure and sense of Empire history, "Conservatism swims like a fish in the sea in which the Labour vote has always been a deviant one".¹⁰¹

The play is not merely a sneer at the aristocracy, since the aristocracy of the play are seen to interact with other elements of society in a manner which none of the plays which I discussed earlier, with the exception of Belcher's Luck,

attempt to portray. The poor behaviour of the aristocrats is not part of an isolated phenomenon, since they are in fact, supported by all levels of society. Even Tucker, whose hatred of the Gurneys and their kind is repeatedly proclaimed by audience address, cannot bring himself to leave their service after the late 13th Earl has settled upon him a sum which makes him a wealthy man in his own right (p.19). The 14th Earl explains Tucker's dedication as being "out of love. He knows he's needed" (p.27), but Tucker's own explanation provides the key theme of the political comedy. "What's keeping you, then Dan?", he asks himself:

[...] You've got the scratch (*Drinks, gloomily*)
Fear. Be honest, now Daniel. Fear and habit.
You get into the habit of serving. Born a servant,
see, son of a servant. Family of servants. From
a nation of servants. Very first thing an English-
man does, straight from his mother's womb is touch
his forelock. That's how they can tell the
wrinkled little bastard's English. Me, this tired
old creeping servant, I'm the real England, not
beef-eating Johnny Bullshit. I know my history.
Masters and servants, that's the way of it. (p.31)

Even as he abuses and sabotages the ruling class, Tucker cannot quite break the habit of social conditioning, hating the Gurneys but still loving the 14th Earl, his master. Tucker is betrayed by the 14th Earl, and as he is taken away in a scene which parodies the whodunnit, Tucker claims:

you wanna do me dirt 'cause I know too much. I know
one percent of the population owns half the property
in England. That vomity one percent needs kosher

killing. Hung up so the blue blood drains out
slow and easy. Aristocratic carcasses hung up like
kosher beef drip-drip-drip (p.107).

In this scene, two stage detectives, Brockett and Fraser, willingly participate in the injustice which is done Tucker, whose alibi is sound and who is convicted entirely on the evidence of Jack (p.104). What really convicts Tucker is the revelation of his political convictions, which prove conclusively to the minds of all present his guilt (pp.105-107). It is socialism which most frightens the characters of The Ruling Class. As Dukore points out,¹⁰² it is the mad but harmless Jack's desire to see the end of pomp and riches, for "the mighty to bow down before the pricks of louse ridden rogues" (p.28) which truly disturbs the family. This new discovery is the icing on the cake for Uncle Charles, who declares "destroying property ...all men equal ... (*pointing after Earl*) My God Claire, he's not only mad, he's Bolshie!" (p.29). The two detectives are overwhelmed by the occasion of meeting a real aristocrat, and cannot consider his guilt, Brockett remarking, as they take their leave:

My lord, I'd just like to say what a pleasure it's
been meeting you. It couldn't 'ave been easy. But
you realized I was only doing my job. You've shown
me what "noblesse oblige" really means. (p.108)

Indeed he has, but the detectives are not the only members of the lower orders who share the Gurney values. The two local ladies who make parallel visits in each of the two acts to the peaceful but insane Jack and the new "cured" homicidal maniac are also mouthpieces for a culture which teaches them to ape the values of their betters. They do not perceive politicality in

the Tory culture, so great is its influence. When they arrive in the first act to ask the new Earl of Gurney to open the church fete and give a speech:

EARL OF GURNEY: On what text, mother superior?

MRS PIGGOT-JONES: We leave that to the speaker.

It can be on any topic of general interest. Hanging, immigration, the stranglehold of the Unions.

Anything...

MRS. TREADWELL: So long as it isn't political.(pp.35-36)

They are terrified by the Earl in the first act, but in the second they are impressed by the new Earl. Returning from the church fete, which finally took the speaking subject of "the rise of crime and socialism" (p.93), their inherent class snobbery is flattered by Jack, who remarks "breeding speaks to breeding" when they agree with his impassioned cry for the re-introduction of hanging, provoking the reply from Mrs. Treadwell "I've always believed I'm descended from the kings of Munster, even though my family originally came from Wimbledon" (p.94). The Earl of Gurney is not a relic of an attenuated or ossified culture, but a part of their own aspirations and value systems. The same applies to Grace, who unlike Bessie, her counterpart in The Chiltern Hundreds, adapts very happily to her elevated lifestyle. As Dr. Herder remarks to the cured Jack "You believe more or less what other people believe" (p.109), a statement which is intended to convey not only a joke about Jack's "sanity", but to the political survival of his class. Dr. Herder represents the important outsider to the farce, since he is a foreigner, a fact which disturbs both Sir Charles (p.24) and Truscott (p.86). It is Herder's "state of "grace" which allows him to make the double edged remark, but his dissent

leads to his destruction, just as it does for Tucker. Unable to accept that Jack's "normality" has made of him a sex murderer, Herder has a breakdown, and exits railing against the upper classes (p.111).

Barnes uses precisely the same images as those playwrights who preceded him in dealing with the upper classes. There is the inevitable use of ritual, for example, which finds echoes in And Did Those Feet?, Sleeping Dog, Vote, Vote, Vote for Nigel Barton and, for that matter Early Morning. As with the last play in particular, a tremendous importance is attached by the characters to ritual, no matter how ossified or meaningless. Consider, for example, the church services conducted by Bishop Lampton. Of the funeral service conducted for the 13th Earl, Sir Charles says "an excellent service", and part of its great quality, the Bishop points out, is the fact that its audience does not understand it (p.16). The Bishop's clothes, like those of Buchanan in The Good and Faithful Servant, are almost the entire man, since once he has removed his ceremonial robes "*he has shrunk to a small, bald-headed asthmatic old man*" (p.15). So too, in the wedding scene (pp.56-58) we are treated to an absolute travesty of a wedding service, where the 14th Earl, the only partner who is truly in love, turns up completely inappropriately dressed, in contrast to the full regalia of the loveless family that surrounds him. At each formal question of the ceremony, propriety is undermined - at the "if anyone can show just cause...", no one is allowed to "speak out", for "CLAIRE, SIR CHARLES and DINSDALE stare deliberately at the audience. Silence". Significantly, the audience itself is brought into the conspiracy of British hierarchy, and as if to emphasise their part in the ruling class ascendancy, Tucker

abuses the audience: "Load a' jelly meat whiskers! Stand up on your tea-soaked haunches and stop it. Piddling, half-dead Helots!" Just as all of the classes of the play are brought into the standing injustice, so too is the audience. Once again when the final question about confessing any impediment to the marriage is addressed to the groom, he confesses to being married to the Virgin Mary, and Claire extolls him: "It's only a rhetorical question, like all the others in the wedding service". Then when the Bishop asks for a simple "I will", he receives in reply a long joyous, but blasphemous affirmative, without the requisite words. The 14th Earl's genuine passion cannot be contained or expressed by an archaic ritual response, and as his dissent from form becomes increasingly alarming, so the others are forced to increasingly travesty the ritual themselves. The Bishop hurries through his lines with increasing, breakneck speed, and Grace joins in:

BISHOP LAMPTON: Repeat after me

GRACE: I know the lines. I Grace Shelley, take thee

JC [...]

Sir Charles then leaps forward to thrust the ring onto Grace's finger without Jack's intervention and the Bishop utters the final lines of the ceremony before collapsing on the floor in an asthmatic and distressed state. The "happy couple" are then rushed off to their nuptials without further formality (pp.59-61).

The images of ritual and ceremony take on an entirely different meaning in the second act, after the 14th Earl's "cure". We are first confronted with the ritual of the baptism of Vincent, which is carried off as a model of its kind, although in the absence of the father (p.77). But the most significant

ceremonies are those surrounding the House of Lords. Much is made of his donning of his parliamentary robes, which in his earlier "mad" phase, he attempted to have burned (pp.28-29), as he announces his intention of taking his seat as part of the upper house/lower house team with Dinsdale for their campaign to bring back hanging (pp.112-113). After much vaunting of his return we are treated to the ritual of the opening of the Lords, with the Lords entering to the Pomp and Circumstance March (p.117). They are seen to be decrepit old men, dragging "mouldering dummies dressed as lords" with them, as well as a skeleton. The Lords make a succession of speeches condemning "immorality" and calling for the reintroduction of the birch and hanging and at the climax are joined by the 14th Earl, who makes a speech loaded with Jacobean imagery and climaxing with a parody of Henry V (pp.117-118). The outrageous baroque of the speech may seem to take an audience away from the reality of the House of Lords to a contemporary reader, yet Barnes has in fact quoted directly from the House of Lords debate over capital punishment in the Earl's earlier "the hangman holds society together" (pp.93-94) speech.¹⁰³ Similarly the other noble Lords' sentiments reflect those expressed by the Earl of Westmeath in the same debate, who enthused "I'm for hanging and the cat. Look at England since the cat was given up, murder is getting a national pastime".¹⁰⁴ By addressing himself to a slightly earlier debate, Barnes brings out the issue of the House of Lords which so exercised the public mind at the time of the production, without needing to address the House of Lords reform bill which would not, after all, be easy to present in Barnes' theatrical style.

The House of Lords climax is a standing contradiction of

all those who felt that Barnes was addressing a political issue which was no longer relevant. Even as Benedict Nightingale was writing the politically critical review quoted earlier (February 1969) the House of Lords reform bill was in the final stages of its inevitable abandonment, leaving the Lords untouched, and in a position to hinder further government legislation in the future. Further, to counter the charges of irrelevance, Barnes adds a reference to the rising tide in British politics to which old establishment figures of the Tory right such as Maude and Hailsham were attracted, with a new form of rightwinger, exemplified by Thatcher (by this time she had replaced Boyle as the shadow education minister after a right wing party coup)¹⁰⁵ and Powell. There is a suggestion of the pro-hanging, anti-immigrant, monetarist new right in the Earl of Gurney's speech:

You've forgotten how to punish, my noble Lords.

The strong MUST manipulate the weak. That's the first law of the Universe - was and ever shall be world without end. The weak would hand this planet back to the crabs and primeval slime. The hard survive, the soft quickly turn to corruption (p.118).

In Barnes' later plays, as we shall see, this issue of the hard right which had emerged under Heath, without his encouragement, would become central.

There is a strong self-referential and theatrically self-conscious element to Barnes' plays in general, and The Ruling Class in particular. Frequently quoted is Jack's injunction to Dr. Herder to "kindly leave the stage" (p.110) when the latter confronts Jack with evidence of his murder of Lady Claire. Similarly, the manipulation of the harmless Earl of Gurney is

referred to as "changing the plot" (p.66) and Tucker says of himself, at first seemingly truly, that he is "just 'ere for comic relief" (p.31). The old troupier Grace provides endless theatrical references. She regards everything, but particularly her capacity to thrive amongst the ruling class as a performance (p.62). Most of this functions in the same way as Orton's theatrically self-consciousness theatricality - the performance seeks to remind its audience constantly of its proximity with the "real" world, no matter how grotesque and theatrical it becomes. Hence the Pirandellian moment of self-questioning at the height of the Gurney's risky Lady of the Camellias scam:

DINSDALE: But this isn't playing the game.

SIR CHARLES: GAME? What game? This is no game sir.

This is real (p.47).

The silence which is enjoined by the stares of Sir Charles, Lady Claire and Dinsdale during the wedding scene seeks to include the audience in the conspiracy which is transpiring. The audience is relied upon to be as obedient and status conscious (by their awareness of their hierarchical status in the theatre, as the audience) as they are in the real world. Thus, the reference to the stockbroker uncle by Dr. Herder: "sometimes it's easy to forget that outside this comedy Sir Charles occupies a position of responsibility and power" (p.53).

The theatrical self-consciousness of show as aware of its status as a show is intended to bring the show an enhanced sense of its relationship to the real world. Similarly, Barnes' theatrical technique of drawing upon actual events in order that his audience should not forget that in spite of his free use of

parody, song, melodrama and farce, his theatrical creation is nothing like fantasy. Barnes' belief that "the more bizarre the fact, the more certain that it happened sometime to someone"¹⁰⁶ informs all of his plays. Dukore cites Dr. Herder's experiment of bringing together the two Christ figures as based upon a real case of psychological shock therapy.¹⁰⁷ All of Barnes' plays are full of contemporary references, but only this one is set in the present day, the others relying on historical allegory, however obvious the parallel to modern times. This perhaps indicates Barnes' desire to make not only a state of the nation address, as in his The Bewitched, but also a play which addresses a particular issue - the relationship between the British upper classes with the class hierarchy of the country, and its established institutions, particularly the House of Lords. It is a subject which is best dealt with directly rather than through the slightly more elliptical device of allegory and historical parallel, because it was something which was happening and relevant to an audience of the time. Barnes is, and always was, a political writer (his first British theatrical performance was Sclerosis, in 1965, a play which took a documentary view of the British presence in Cyprus) but The Ruling Class was his first attempt to reject completely social realism as a device for conveying political satire. Of Sclerosis, there is no existent manuscript, but Dukore provides a valuable account of the plot which, according to this thorough critic, represents a contrast of realistic and baroque black comic episodes.¹⁰⁸ The theatrical style adopted in this early play then, is very much like that of the playwrights mentioned earlier, particularly Potter and Mercer - an uneasy mix of two styles which, if we are to believe Dukore's account, does not

ultimately get artistically because of an untidy contrast, scene to scene, of a narrative which must be carried by characters who must be believed throughout. The Ruling Class abandons realism completely, achieving its political ends mainly through expressionistic techniques. Worth shows, in my view, a perceptiveness that is rare in appraisals of this play, in pointing out that:

Barnes has succeeded in doing what it had almost begun to seem couldn't be done; he has naturalized Expressionist techniques^{the techniques} of Wedekind and Strindberg - in a theatre which has been peculiarly resistant to them.¹⁰⁹

Barnes' play contains the characteristic images and ideas of the earlier plays. There is the obsession with continuing the line in a situation of barrenness among the ruling classes. There are the manifestations of insanity and the unhealthy dwelling upon the past, this time even more extreme than in The Governor's Lady or Sleeping Dog, since Jack, on hearing the remarks that the leader of the Conservatives is a carpenter's son (an allusion of course, to Ted Heath), remarks "(surprised) Lord Salisbury's a carpenter's son. Really?" (p.79). It is also evident that although the play is not set in the far-flung corners of Empire, the Gurneys have a particular connection with the colonies. A succession of Gurney sons have died in the outposts of Empire, although, it is hinted, in none too salubrious circumstances (pp.8-9), whilst their suspicion of foreigners is regarded as a right of their class. There are also the usual quiet nods towards Lord Home, particularly in using The Chiltern Hundreds as a vehicle of plot, and of course, the dark hints of sexual degeneracy among all of the Gurneys.

No upper class character is spared a sexual vice, yet they have no offspring to show for it, aside from the idiotic Dinsdale, who cannot be trusted to enter any field but politics, so serious is his inbred stupidity, and the baby Vincent, who was significantly conceived while Jack was not considered a true member of his class, from an allegiance with the working class. After he is cured, Jack can produce no more offspring, because the sexual act necessitates the murder of his mate. Nevertheless, the existence of the child represents an important symbolic change, since it hints at a continuance of the dominance which has traditionally been exercised by the upper classes, as does the unchanged and unchanging House of Lords and the reference to the New Right at the climax. Gone, too are the images of isolation and entrapment. The Gurney estate is an open house to the vital interaction of the rulers with those who are ruled.

But it is technique, not content, which makes Barnes still more different from those black comedians who had covered the same ground earlier. The desire to generate pathos around certain characters, which is so evident in Mercer's Bernard and Timothy, Livings' Mrs. Foster, or Potter's Nigel Barton to name but three, is absent from Barnes' approach. The theatrical status of Barnes' characters, their constant pointing out to the audience that they are characters in a play is an alienation technique, and where there is danger of sympathy arising for particular characters, Barnes turns immediately to melodrama, as with the two murder scenes (pp.97-99 and p.119) or parody as with the whodunnit scene of the arrest of Tucker. Tucker is indeed a dangerously sympathetic character, since he is self-aware, to the extent of understanding his relationship to the

class structure and his socially determined bondage to the hierarchy, which prevents him from escaping even when he has the money to do so, whilst his genuine affection for the 14th Earl is what so tragically proves his undoing. But Barnes skirts sentiment with deftness by turning Tucker's arrest into a scene of high farce, as the house's silverware is seen to be concealed all about him (Dukore likens this to Harpo's identical undoing in the Marx Brothers film Animal Crackers)¹¹⁰ and Tucker, caught red-handed, goes off with, quite literally, a song and dance, with Grace adding, theatrically, "What an exit!" (p.108)

One of Barnes' theatrical aims was, he tells us in the introduction of his collected plays, to create "a drama which made the surreal real".¹¹¹ This end is achieved triumphantly in The Ruling Class, which sticks to its black comic guns with unwavering determination. By not being tempted, as do most of the dramatists mentioned above, to at some point drop the joker's bauble and pick up a blackboard pointer in its place, by never feeling the need to say "but seriously folks" and mean it, Barnes creates an ultimately more powerful political punch. He is able to successfully tread the line of moral writer and moralist. The plays of Potter and Mercer are like lectures enlivened by a cracking joke. Valuable though such lectures are, they fail to take account of the fact that the best jokes do not need the lecture, since the joke itself constitutes the moral lesson, provided it is presented with the right kind of detachment.

FOOTNOTES

1. Lord Home, The Way The Wind Blows (London, 1976), p.142.
2. K. Young, Sir Alec Douglas-Home (London, 1970), p.121.
3. Ibid. p.120.
4. D. Butler and A. King, The British General Election of 1964 (London, 1965), p.79.
5. M. Foot, Harold Wilson (London, 1964), p.97 - a particularly savage example by Vicky in the Daily Express.
6. Howard and West, op.cit, p.62. I should however add the reservation that whilst this was a popular view of the incident, Home claims that he and Poole merely urged Macmillan to make it clear to the party whether or not he intended to step down. I am inclined to believe Home, for he seems an honest man, and further, since he did not, at this time, believe himself to have anything to gain from Macmillan's retirement. (Home, op.cit, p.180).
7. "A Boost from Blackpool", The Spectator,¹⁸ Oct. , 1963.
8. D. Watt, "The Big Fight", The Spectator,¹⁸ Oct. , 1963.
9. A. Howard, "Ambushed By Home", The Observer, 1 March, 1987.
10. Lord Hailsham, The Door Wherein I Went, (London, 1975) p.223.
11. Howard and West, op. cit. p.74.
12. Young, op.cit. p.164.
13. D. Watt, "Waits and Measures", The Spectator,¹¹ Oct. , 1963.
14. Hailsham, op.cit. p.221.
15. N. Fisher, Iain Macleod (London, 1973), p.236.
16. Watt, op.cit. (Oct.)¹⁸
17. Watt, op.cit. (Oct.)¹¹
18. Howard and West, op.cit. p.75.
19. R. Rose, "The Emergence of Leaders", New Society, 17 Oct. 1963.
20. "The New Meaning", New Society, 24 Oct. 1963.
21. Indeed, it would subsequently be answered by Macmillan himself, who acknowledged Home's caretaker role in a television interview: R. Mackenzie (interviewer), At The End of The Day, BBC TV, London, 1973.
22. "Redmayne", The Listener, 19th Dec., 1963.

23. Foot, op.cit. p.11.
24. The play was never published, but some accounts of the plot survive, for example, in J.R. Taylor, The Second Wave (London, 1971), p.213.
25. P. Luke, The Play of Hadrian VII (Harmondsworth, 1969)
26. R. Coskren, "Peter Luke", S. Weintraub (ed) Dictionary of Literary Biography ¹³ (1982) p.313
27. D. Cregan, Three Men For Colverton, (London, 1967)
28. D. Cregan, The Houses by The Green, (London, 1969)
29. D. Frost and N. Sherrin (eds), That Was The Week That Was (London, 1963), p.156.
30. Young, op.cit. p.214.
31. D. Potter, The Nigel Barton Plays (Harmondsworth, 1967)
32. D. Mercer, Three TV Comedies (London 1966)
33. D. Mercer, The Governor's Lady (London, 1968)
34. D. Mercer, Belcher's Luck, (London, 1967)
35. Potter, op.cit. "Introduction", p.11.
36. Home, op.cit. p.281.
37. Potter, op.cit. "Introduction", p.16.
38. Home, op.cit. p.203.
39. "Sir Alec Delivers the Final Thrust", The Times, ¹⁶ Oct. 1, 1964
40. Howard and West, op.cit. pp.116-117.
41. Young, op.cit. p.176.
42. Howard and West, op.cit. p.103.
43. A.W. Singham, "Immigration and the Election", Butler and King, op.cit. p.361.
44. Ibid. p.365.
45. Ibid. Idem - Home paralleled Powell in a more active conversion to the anti-immigration cause later, for in April, 1968, shortly before Powell made his infamous "rivers of blood" speech in Birmingham, Home made, in his own words an even "more extreme" repatriation speech, but as he lacked Powell's eye for the colourful phrase, his speech was barely noticed and remained uncondemned - Young, op.cit. pp.239-240.
46. P. Purser, "Dennis Potter", G.W. Brandt (ed), British Television Drama (Cambridge, 1981), p.173.

47. Home, op.cit. p.217.
48. Purser, op.cit. p.176.
49. Potter, op.cit. "Introduction", p.16.
50. C. King, The Cecil King Diary, 1965-1970 (London, 1972), p.23.
51. Home, op.cit. pp.279-285.
52. I might add, perhaps a little parochially, that Hare seems to have a hang-up about Australians, portraying them in a number of later plays too, in a manner in which he would not portray an Irishman, a West Indian or a Jew without avoiding the justified charge of racism.
53. Howard and West, op.cit. p.93.
54. Nora Beloff, Transit of Britain (Glasgow, 1973), p.271.
55. It should be pointed out that an earlier version of the play appeared on radio according to Taylor (op.cit. The Second Wave, p.42) though this version was not published.
56. S. Gray, Sleeping Dog (London, 1968)
57. The location of The Governor's Lady is a softer version of the same image, being a remote mansion which is surrounded on all sides by impenetrable jungle, as with the other plays the claustrophobic atmosphere is central to the play's dramatic power.
58. H. Livings, The Little Mrs. Foster Show (London, 1969)
59. D. Cregan, The Houses by The Green (London, 1969)
60. In response to Wilson's repeated references to "this 14th Earl of Home", Home had remarked that he presumed that Mr. Wilson was the fourteenth Mr. Wilson - Home, op.cit. p.186.
61. F. Stacey, British Government 1966-1975: Years of Reform (Oxford, 1975), pp.72-73.
62. "The Lords Power to Frustrate", Guardian, 11 April, 1967.
63. "MPs Should Back Policy or Resign", Guardian, 10 April, 1967.
64. "Abortion and The Lords", New Statesman, 20 Oct. 1967.
65. Stacey, op.cit. p.73.
66. "Unruly Lords", The Listener, 20 June, 1968.
67. J. Enoch Powell, "The Conservative Working Man," Spectator, 1 Nov. 1968.
68. A. Sinclair, The Last of The Best: The Aristocracy of Europe in the Twentieth Century (London, 1969), p.251.
69. Auberon Waugh, "Near Peers and Essential Experts", Spectator, 8 Nov. 1968.

70. "Attack on Indefensible Power over Bills", Guardian, 13 April, 1967.
71. Whittakers Almanac: 1965, (London, 1965), p.223.
72. R.H.S. Crossman, Diaries of a Cabinet Minister, Vol.III (London, 1977), p.99.
73. J.M.W. Thompson, "No Tears for Peers", Spectator, 1 Nov. 1968.
74. Crossman, op.cit. p.292.
75. D. Marquand, "Backbench Power", New Society, 24 April, 1969.
76. Crossman, op.cit. p.765.
77. Asa Briggs, "Old Society", New Society, 27 March, 1969.
78. Peter Barnes, Collected Plays, (London, 1981), pp.1-120.
79. Perhaps an allusion to Grace Kelly, who may have been accused in some quarters of the same kind of cynicism that this character seems to be guilty in also marrying an aristocrat.
80. Bernard Levin, The Pendulum Years (London, 1970), p.49.
81. W. Young, The Profumo Affair: Aspects of Conservatism (Harmondsworth, 1963), p.20 and p.39.
82. Levin, op.cit. pp.63-64.
83. I. Wardle, "Overloaded with Good Material", Times, 29 Feb. 1969.
84. It is notable, on the theme of the actual Gurney family's lack of fertility, that neither Sir Charles nor Bishop Lampton are full blood relatives of the 13th Earl. Lampton's name, of course, suggests the prominent aristocratic family who were cousins to the Homes, although it does not allude to the fall of Tony Lambton in the notorious sex and drugs scandal, which did not occur until 1973.
85. W. Douglas Home, The Chiltern Hundreds, (London, 1949)
86. "William Douglas Home", Wentworth, op.cit. p.250
87. R. Armer, A Critical History of British Cinema (London, 1978), p.190.
88. B. Dukore, The Theatre of Peter Barnes (London, 1981), pp.5-6.
89. K. Young, op.cit. p.32.
90. Ibid. p.5.
91. Dukore, op.cit. pp.1-4.
92. In fact, one of Kenneth Hurren's, "A Court without Heirs and Graces", Spectator, 18 May, 1974.
93. A.P. Hinchliffe, British Theatre 1950-70 (Oxford, 1974), pp.168-170.

94. B. Nightingale, "St. Bartholomew's Day?" New Statesman, 7 March, 1969.
95. H. Spurling, "Bond Honoured", Spectator, 7 March, 1969.
96. B. Nightingale, "Clowning", New Statesman, 12 Dec. 1969.
97. J. Hammond, "Barnes, Peter", J. Vinson (ed), Contemporary Dramatists (London, 1981), p.72.
98. Wardle, op.cit.
99. Dukore, op.cit. p.63.
100. R.W. Johnson, The Politics of Recession (London, 1985), p.224.
101. Ibid. p.234.
102. Dukore, op.cit. p.15.
103. Ibid. p.50.
104. Sinclair, op.cit. p.281.
105. A. Roth, Heath and The Heathmen (London, 1972), p.206.
106. Barnes, op.cit. p.122 (Introduction to Leonardo's Last Supper).
107. Dukore, op.cit. pp.50-51.
108. Ibid. pp.75-79.
109. K.J. Worth, Revolutions in Modern British Drama (London, 1972), p.159.
110. Dukore, op.cit. p.57.
111. Barnes, op.cit. p.VIII.

CHAPTER TWO

WILSON AND THE LABOUR PARTY

1964 - 1970

"J.F. Kennedy described himself in a brilliant phrase as an idealist without illusions. I would describe the Prime Minister as an illusionist without ideals".

Iain Macleod, 1966.

(Fisher, op.cit. p.281.)

In his excellent account of Post-War British Theatre, John Elsom expresses the view that the playwrights of the generation which followed that of Wesker and Osborne were left with little to satirise. He identifies 1964 as the specific turning point, remarking that "The outpouring of new British plays in the eight years ^{followed} which, 1956 was distinguished by two kinds of revolt; technically, against the 'well made play' and, emotionally, against the stuffiness of the 'British establishment'".¹ All this is true, and so too is the contention following this, that the background of a conservative government and the decline of the empire mentality following the Suez crisis had provided that group of playwrights known, more for the sake of expediency than accuracy, as the "angry young men" with a social climate and a target for their historically specific grievances. But Elsom goes on to assert that writers of left-wing tendencies (and no critic of the era would deny that the overwhelming majority of playwrights held broadly left-wing views) lost the material of satire and, indeed, the desire to attack the government, because with the election of Wilson to the premiership in 1964, most playwrights were drawn into a "rough general support for the government in power", and tended to lambast, instead, a more vague group of targets, "thus absolving the Labour Party from blame".²

That this is not a wholly accurate account of the attitudes of modern British dramatists to the Wilson government can be seen from Katherine Itzin's Stages In The Revolution, which discusses fringe groups such as CAST, whose savage attacks upon the Wilson administration had begun around a year after its first election victory,³ Agit-Prop and Red Ladder, who first began performing in 1968.⁴ Most of the plays produced by these

companies were satirical, and, judging by accounts of their plots (the plays never underwent the process of publishing, nor sometimes even of writing down, perhaps rightly, for they do not by their nature seem amenable to such procedures), there was a strong element of black comedy involved in the satire. Certainly, according to Ansorge, CAST's recurrent protagonist, Muggins, was invariably made to suffer appalling indignities as part of the comedy, and generally seemed to come to a bad end, "For Muggins clung vainly to a 1930's faith in the policies of the Labour Party while Wilsonian Britain was shown to be undermining such an ideology with a ruthless conviction".⁵ Our own purpose is less concerned with fringe companies such as CAST, than with more "establishment" forms of drama, and here the issue becomes more complex than Elsom would imply. Certainly, early in the life of the new administration a few black comedies tended to extend a tacit support to the Labour Party, simply by their failure to criticise, or even to mention the government. In And Did Those Feet?, which was broadcast within eight months of the Labour election victory, the figures of Wilson's new society are conspicuous by their absence, Mercer preferring^r to expend his entire creative energy in seeing off the shadow of "Homeism". The same could be said of his The Governor's Lady, which was produced even earlier, in February, 1965. In both of these plays, the world attacking the stultified, barren, but powerful aristocrats is seen benevolently as at least an improvement upon the legacy of imperialism in Africa in the case of the latter play, and class exploitation at home, in the former. In the Nigel Barton plays, Potter also tends to adopt a pragmatic attitude to the Labour movement as the better of two evils. He is more ambiguous than

Mercer, in that he is forced to discuss the Labour movement by the very nature of his attack upon the conservatives, and his picture of the Labour movement, as I have indicated, is hardly flattering, but Potter's approach is one of perseverance, as is indicated by his own ideas on the play:

"Disillusion with the tattier mechanics, the clockwork, of party politics is not, however, the same thing as total political cynicism, which is surely a dangerous and disreputable position to maintain. I did not want to scrub out - indeed I wanted to emphasise - a vigorous, activist attitude which could be strong enough to step over the tub-thumper's little box or tear down the big bright poster"

"Introduction", (pp.13-14)

Jack Hay, who, Potter stresses, is in fact a disillusioned idealist (Potter was asked by the BBC to tone down the savagery of his portrayal of Hay)⁶ is allowed the last word in the matter:

"HAY: You'll have to compromise, smile, concern yourself with your public image, measure your words as carefully as possible...and turn yourself into a dutiful party hack! [...] Play by the rules, Nigel - there's no alternative. If you really want to change things, you have the power to do it. Instead you'll lose your deposit". (p.125)

The Governor's Lady, And Did Those Feet? and Vote, Vote, Vote for Nigel Barton are, however, exceptions to the rule of an intolerance towards the Labour Party amongst playwrights of the early sixties.

The focal point of disquiet about the Labour Party after

1964 was its leading advertisement in the period preceding that fateful year, Harold Wilson. A yearly Gallup Poll taken in December of every year from 1957 onwards, had, in answer to the question of whether the coming year would be better, worse or the same for Britain, shown a consistent increase in the number of people answering "worse". This trend continued until 1963, when the number of people answering "worse" fell from thirty percent to seven.⁷ This astonishing reversal can be substantially attributed to new movements in British politics. Wilson's arrival, after years of stultifying Gaitskellism,^{7a} suddenly gave Britain a credible alternative government, and with the decline in the fortunes of the conservatives, a radical change seemed imminent. A new society with an emphasis on technological development, was promised by Wilson, whose "white-hot furnace of technology" imagery seemed to rivet the public. Of his final election broadcast of the 1964 general election, The Times enthused: "The music was sweet, and Mr. Wilson played with diabolical skill. This was no dry statistician, no waspish debater - this was a young man, with emotions and aspirations of his own".⁸ The new hope (and arguably the October election) prompted Anthony Greenwood, the Labour Party Chairman, to assure his readers: "Given a Labour Government we can build a new, better, more beautiful Britain where the quality of living will matter as much as the standard of living".⁹ The new spirit was irrefutably associated with Wilson (even by grudgingly admiring Tories)¹⁰ who was, in turn, associated with Kennedy, to whom the Labour Party, and Wilson himself, eagerly drew comparisons.¹¹ If there were some reservations about the vagueness of Wilson's promises to build up British technology,¹² and a certain unease about the almost

too professional, ruthless and cunning character of the man himself, the outlook was nevertheless more optimistic than it had been for a good many years. The failure of the new society became increasingly manifest as the months after the October election win passed.

Given the centrality of Wilson to this beautiful fantasy of regeneration, it is not surprising that much of the criticism by dramatists of the period focused upon the egotistical personality of the man himself. This is evident in Ableman's Green Julia (1965)¹³, which sets up Jake, the working-class student of this duologue between two undergraduates as a personality which has much in common with Wilson. The upper middle class plant physiologist, Bob, identifies Jake's manipulative character (pp.19-20) as part of his (Jake's) need for power, and his cynical careerism as "a little thin in ideals" (p.35), something which in turn leads Jake to mock his friend's liberalised tendencies (pp.46-47) and gives rise to a confrontation in which Jake dismisses the inequality of wealth in the world, retaliating to Bob's insistent questioning by labelling him a potential dictator. It is during their arguments that Bob tends to draw attention to Jake's Wilsonish egotism. For example, in the significantly ritualised piece of byplay in which Bob plays a Catholic priest, attempting to exorcise "Father Jake" of the "power lust" from which the young economist¹⁴ suffers (pp.25-26) a revealing interjection occurs in Jake's attempts to justify his moral character: "JAKE: Probe my motives? No, I think I can say, without any trace of doubt - BOB: That I'm the best prime minister the country's ever had" (p.25). Similarly, in Mrs. Wilson's Diary¹⁵ (1968), Mary overhears Harold talking in his sleep: "Late in the night I

heard him mumbling in his dreams , "Would you agree that Harold Wilson is the most brilliant and intelligent Prime Minister that the country has ever had? Eighty-five percent 'yes', fifteen percent probably. "I fear he must be a little overwrought" (p.9). A strong element of the implied comparison of Malcolm Scrawdyke to Wilson in Little Malcolm and His Struggle Against the Eunuchs¹⁶ (1965), which I will expand upon later, also relies heavily on the egregious vanity of the youth. What is most stressed about these characters is their absurd delusions of grandeur, something of which Wilson was repeatedly accused. At the collapse of In Place of Strife in the summer of 1969, for example, Wilson assured the electorate that he would be able to control wildcat strikes by personal intervention, and was promptly lambasted by most of the press. A Spectator editorial of late May compared Wilson to "Walter Mitty, living in a dream world".¹⁷ This is precisely the complaint made of Baba in John Antrobus' Trixie and Baba¹⁸ (1965). "You live in a dream world - and I always get the blame" (p.51) cries Trixie of the man whose modelling of himself upon Wilson brings the lives of the central characters to the brink of catastrophe. The situation of the Wilson-clone is very much that of his master, of whom Cecil King said, during the devaluation crisis:

You cannot break through Wilson's facade of buoyant optimism. His vanity is quite astonishing - each failure is hailed as a brilliant breakthrough; realism never shows up. One must wait for events to reveal to the world that the emperor has no clothes.¹⁹

There were also physical descriptions of Wilson which amounted to a kind of abusive burlesque which combined nicely with political vitriol. In David Pinner's Fanghorn²⁰ (1966),

the picture of Wilson, who is never actually named as Prime Minister, but is obviously indicated, is one which is grotesquely evocative of the media picture of the man. Joseph, the secretary to the Minister of Defence (p.9) says of his own role in the international crisis which occurs as a background to the events of the play: "Well, I gave the P. M. the words. Millions of them. Half of them I didn't understand so I knew he was clueless. He just glazed his eyes at me. Fat and slimey, with bullfrog overtones - like on the 'Telly" (p.42).

The question of Wilson's words assumed great importance to the black comedians of the second half of the sixties and on into the seventies. There is the repeated implication in the press that the inaction of the new government was partly due to an "opposition mentality" which substituted a good speech in parliament for political action. This was not only spoken of in personal diaries of the time²¹ but also in contemporary accounts of the government. In the infamous article which lost Angus Maude his place in Heath's shadow cabinet²², Maude would also complain of the Labour Party:

Scarcely a minister ever actually does anything but each week the political correspondents faithfully retail the privately communicated outlines of a new and grandiose ministerial plan. Integration, co-ordination, nationalisation, reorganisation, modernisation - most ministers can do it in their sleep.²³

Similarly, Wilson's own political inaction was attacked with particular emphasis on his vacuous phrasemaking. This complaint is exemplified by articles written shortly before the 1967 party conference, which would see a number of disastrous

platform defeats, particularly with regard to Britain's tacit support of the American intervention in Vietnam. New Society accurately predicted that: "Wilson's greatest danger, on his past form is that he will try to avoid making any choices at all. In other words, there will be no significant concessions and evasive and ambiguous oratory".²⁴ This had, for some years been Wilson's stock in trade - even before he became Prime Minister, he had been admired for his "imperturbable skill in avoiding every awkward issue and every occasion which might embroil him in too positive a statement of his intentions".²⁵ By the end of our chosen decade, "Mr. Wilson's lifelong devotion to euphemism and fear of a stand up fight" had become the subject of abuse, not admiration, even from members of the Labour Party.²⁶ The problem of those in power seeking desperately to find words which committed them to no particular action is one which is frequently taken up by the black comedies of 1965 to 1970 in particular. In Cregan's Miniatures²⁷ (1965), Reg's organisation of dissent within David's inner cabinet rests essentially on his instruction to his henchman, Raymond, to "refrain from saying anything which can be construed in any way at all" (p.64). This attitude also informs Vote, Vote, Vote For Nigel Barton, something which Potter is unable to forgive even at this early stage. Sir Oswald Mosley is made to put the case ironically, by being quoted in his own era. "Politicians", he remarks piously "are regarded as people who have learned to talk, but not to act" (p.106), leaving the contemporary audience wondering at the validity of the high-selling record of that year (1965), "The times they are a'changin'". Certainly Anne and Jack Hay both provide Nigel with the indispensable advice that the key to power for a Labour MP is "to smile, concern

yourself with your public image [and] measure your words as carefully as possible" (p.124). For Scrawdyke, in Little Malcolm and His Struggle Against The Eunuchs, the only protection of his obvious inaction, which typically leads him even to make a theoretical analysis of getting up in the morning, whilst staying in bed (p.12), are his words, and it is specifically the moment when Wick attacks the hollowness of his rhetoric, that his credibility collapses (p.135). The response of Victor to the Wilsonian plans of Helen for the estate which it is not Belcher's luck to inherit, is representative of the hardened pragmatist's response to the Prime Minister. Since Victor is "not afflicted with a point of view" (p.51), he is able to reply evenly to Helen's plans for the estate with "I'm never interested in what people are going to do until they've done it (pause) It's the only policy I've found leads consistently to inaction" (p.52). Such political positions are unsurprisingly prevalent in plays of this ilk in the second half of the sixties.

In some of these cases the burlesque of Wilson is obvious enough not to require comment (Fanghorn, Mrs. Wilson's Diary) but in plays such as Green Julia and Little Malcolm and His Struggle Against The Eunuchs, the parallel is more of the Wilsonian figure than of Wilson himself. In the case of Little Malcolm and His Struggle Against The Eunuchs, for example, Scrawdyke is clearly not intended to "be" Harold Wilson, yet in an age which saw Wilson introduce concepts such as professionalism and delegation to the world of politics, Scrawdyke becomes the quintessential politician of his era, paralleling in his elaborate juggling act the man who became the leading politician of the era. Halliwell had little to say

about who precisely, if anyone, was the subject of his black comedy, but Hobson saw the play as an attack on the left by a right-wing playwright.²⁸ This may not be so, but there is an element of "liberal" politicians as a primary target, as well as a suggestion of even Hitler in the parody. Perhaps the play is an attack on the character of all politicians, with Wilson predominant in this amalgam, as the leading politician of his period. Part of the problem of parodying Wilson was his notorious sensitivity to personal criticism, repeatedly attested to by the Governor of the BBC, Lord Hill, whose relations with Wilson reached a nadir in 1968, when Wilson threatened legal action against the governors after a comparatively innocuous jibe by a comedian.²⁹

For Wilson the question of leadership, then, was one of language. It was also one of the manipulation of those forces which opposed him. Like Heath, Wilson was never quite in control of his party. Throughout the latter sixties there always seemed to be a chance that Wilson would lose his premiership to another member of his cabinet. At the culmination of the "Wilson must go" campaign in 1968, George Brown resigned, and by the last two years before the accession of Heath, it became felt that Wilson could only lead the Labour Party to disaster in the 1970 election.³⁰ It was only the lack of a credible alternative leader, and the general impression that "no Labour Prime Minister could win" in any case, that kept Wilson in power.³¹ The inability of Wilson to establish decisive leadership, combined with Heath's problems of a similar nature with the conservatives, brought the metaphor of the weak leader within a central political institution beyond the era of Home. The inability of a leader with ostensibly

reformist ambitions to act is returned to again and again in the latter 1960s. Further to the "dynamic" young heir's real character in Belcher's Luck is his admission that "I can't prefer one course of events to another (pause) I'm amazed by everything and everybody...all the ceaseless activity" (p.100). He is a man who, for all his indefatigable verbal activism, particularly in aggravating his working class father, has "never opposed anybody" (p.102). In Fanghorn, Joseph's apparent firm control of the household, a private parallel to his public position, crumbles because of its literal ("You exude the must of Parliament - years of mildew and bad breath" - says grandpa to the secretary of state - p.20) and metaphorical decadence. His is a crisis induced by his historical dilemma, as is that of Baba in Trixie and Baba. The mini-Wilson is, like his hero (who at the time of this production, was faced with the collapse and abandonment of In Place of Strife) is seen by Trixie as unable to "stick to a decision" (p.66).

There were not only attacks upon Wilson's inability to act with resolution, but also upon Heath's attacks upon Wilson, which were hardly made from a position of strength. Much was made of Heath's calls for "strong government" from Wilson, when at the same time he struggled to maintain control of his own party. Aside from the Angus Maude affair, there were a succession of rebellions and dismissals from his shadow cabinet, as in the affair of the sacking of his right-wing party chairman, Edward Du Cann, who was replaced by Anthony Barber, an incident which illustrated to New Society Heath's "inability to make things work for him rather than against him",³² and which to The New Statesman illustrated his personal weakness.³³ Thus Pixie Heath's call for a "strong woman", in Orton's unproduced

filmscript Up Against It (1967)³⁴ was bound to be seen in an ironic light, in that year, of all years.³⁵ As if such heavy irony is not observable, Orton underlines his joke by having Pixie Heath become Prime Minister after the assassination of her opponent and utterly fail to take command, being finally forced to declare "Feel worn out. Personal charm [!] a failure. Acting on the advice of Doctor [Angus?] Maud and Rev. Daisy Greene, I declared a state of war as existing 1300 hours" (p.52).

Under the particular stresses which Wilson faced, his style of Prime Ministership was devious and manipulative, often characterised by his playing off of the party's left against its right, seeming to give way to both sides and then entering on the side of party unity in order to achieve his ends. It was a governmental style noticed not only by his own cabinet ministers³⁶ and those close to the government³⁷, but also by the press. Towards the end of his second government, Wilson's position became almost impossible. With the isolation of his traditional, but always rather grudging support from the left of the parliamentary party, and the enforced appointment of anti-Wilson cabinet ministers³⁸, he could "no longer play the party off against the cabinet, or even the members of the cabinet against each other. He is on his own".³⁹ So manipulative was Wilson, that complaints began to be heard of a fall in international confidence in Britain, because of the exceptionally high number of cabinet reshuffles.⁴⁰ Indeed, Michael Stewart was obliged, on entering the office of Foreign Secretary for the second time in 1968 (his appointment being the fourth reshuffle of this office since 1964) to ask for a guarantee of tenure for the remainder of the government's life,

since he had been "shuffled simply to facilitate a Cabinet reshuffle" in his previous occupancy of the office in 1965-66, and because "it does not help a Foreign Secretary if the Foreign Ministers of other countries think that he may at any moment be whisked away".⁴¹ The playing off of one political force against another by a central character is a political metaphor of eloquence and utility in the plays of the period coinciding with the Wilson premiership of 1964 to 1970. It is in fact, the central device of these dramatists, who sought to create the atmosphere of duplicitous political chicanery which is so pervasive in comedies of the era. In Belcher's Luck, it is Helen, a character explicitly compared to Wilson by the author,⁴² who manipulates the various forces of the play in order to gain her ends. Unable to attain the crumbling estate directly, she brings about the death of Sir Gerald by playing off Belcher and Victor, giving the working-class Belcher his only chance of inheritance and of defeating his detested son by murdering Catesby and forming an alliance, sexual and political, with her. At the same time, however, she courts the advances of Victor, so that when Belcher has committed the murder, he is expelled by an alliance of the socially ambitious and sexually ambiguous. In Three Men For Colverton, even Mrs. Carnock "handles power obliquely", as Cregan himself remarks,⁴³ acting in a surprisingly Wilsonish manner in watering down Swan's objections to her scheming by explaining "We all need guidance, Mr. Swan, tramping through this vale of tears, especially if we have ambitions to fulfil in high places" (p.20). Having bought off Swan, Mrs. Carnock begins to flirt with the idea, bearing in mind Milend's weakness, of bestowing power upon Brother Edward, an interesting allegorical point

about the rise of "pragmatic" socialism. Edward is not least a perspicacious man, observing of Mrs. Carnock: "...it's never been your way to order people - directly" (p.39). But Edward himself is a similar wielder of power, since it is by subtle persuasion and seductive promises of power that he gains the assistance of Father Pym in convincing Mrs. Carnock that the governance of Colverton would be best left in the hands of the ambitious monk. Once Edward is promised the all-powerful ashes of Carnock, however, he quickly abandons Pym (pp.38-41). The tone of Three Men for Colverton remains constantly at this level. Pym advises Swan to "Wait until you're unassailable before you doubt the virgin birth in public", regarding his unassailability as inevitable, since "if you're devious enough to come to rational conclusions and yet remain a priest you won't be overlooked [...] The stuff of bishops. Dove and Snake" (p.55). The tremendous degree of almost mindless, completely visionless pragmatism is part of an age which Wilson defined. That Cregan is discussing the state of the nation is clear enough, even given Cregan's reluctance to discuss the allegorical nature of his plays, which is characterised by his admission that The Houses by The Green is an allegory, but his refusal, on the grounds that directors might allow the comedy to suffer in order to emphasise the social commentary, to comment too freely on the state of the nation (pp.6-7). But in combination with his farceur's instinct, it was his social commentary which attracted George Devine's attention, making him a favourite of the Royal Court in the sixties.⁴⁴

In Three Men For Colverton, personal and political elements are closely intertwined in the way that the farce unwinds. Politics do not affect marriages, they are marriages.

Just as the three men of the title may refer to the three radical visitors, Edward, Dorman and Ched, it also ambiguously refers to the three ways open to Colverton in the future represented by the three possible leaders, the High Tory Milend, the new consensus Conservative Pym or the pragmatic radical Edward. Much of the dark comic energy of the play derives from the temptations of the various individuals of each party into sexual or marital liaisons with individuals of other parties, thereby drawing most of the characters into a version of consensus which is painful, rather than harmonious. Dorman, Edward's "hard left" a kind of radical evangelist, is pulled into a relationship with the old Tory matriarch, Mrs. Harrison. "Let me not sink into tolerance", he cries desperately (p.48), but eventually he succumbs to her dubious charms, lamenting:

I never tolerated anything ^{not} before I met that woman,
not properly. Maybe her attraction is she's middle
class and secure enough to be reasonable, which she
can be, but I've learnt through her a general need
for tolerance (p.66)

Similarly, Brother Ched becomes involved in a sexual relationship with Mr. Dole, something which brings Dole into a "respectability" with Hesther that he had, as a middle aged drop-out, denied. For the powers that be in the play, marriage is a form of manipulative stabilisation, thus Mrs. Carnock is able to shackle Mrs. Harrison with her knowledge of her affair with Dorman (p.62), as Dorman is himself shackled by his love for Mrs. Harrison. So, too, Mrs. Carnock demonstrates her Wilsonish creation of a stand-off of opposing elements in order to attain her own ends with her plans for Mr. Swan, who is to be married off to Miss Fisher:

That girl would anchor Cedric Swan like a ton of sand. Then he could settle down under the guidance of Edward and they would cancel one another out.

So neat (p.60)

Milend's subsequent attempts to marry off Swan to Miss Fisher (by this time it has become apparent to Milend that he will not have her for himself, as this would block his access to power) initially seem benevolent, but soon he loses patience with the recalcitrant Swan, commanding: "You'll marry that soft, New Statesman-reading, woolly-minded left-wing humanist, and I will get the ashes from that bleeding little queer [Ched]" (p.72), thereby revealing his tendentiousness.⁴⁵

This carefully established sense of cabinet competition and hierarchy is also evident in Miniatures, in which questions of who is best able to communicate with the headmaster are paramount (p.17) and where an impression of interminable "hatching" (p.30) between Reg and Raymond are seen as a direct contributant to the sense of paranoia which reigns in the school. Reg is the logical creation of such an atmosphere. He is reluctant to "verbalise" any position of his own (p.52) but wishes to "know what every mind is thinking" on the staff. Finally, he seems to collapse into a persecution complex, obsessed by his loss of drawing pins from his office. What is evident in all of Cregan's plays is a sense of non-leadership, with leaders for various reasons, including illness, death, incompetence, or liberal paralysis, unable or unwilling to control colleagues firmly, and instead resorting to manipulativeness or invisibility in crisis to guide their institutions. Similarly, in Little Malcolm and His Struggle Against The Eunuchs, Scrawdyke illustrates the syndrome

whenever he is pressured. When, for example, the need to produce money for the gas meter finds him at a loss, he magnanimously informs his colleagues in the Dynamic Erection Party "I delegate the decision to you. I step completely out of the situation and leave it all t'you" (p.117). In Mrs. Wilson's Diary the phenomena of "non-confrontational" leadership is brought frequently to the fore, as when the truculent Woodrow Wyatt is brought to heel, not by confrontation, but by a "chummy" manner and the offer of a cabinet post (pp.64-65).

Of all Wilson's failures, and these were legion in the eyes of the dramatists of black humour, surely the most serious was his simple failure to convey a genuine dynamic reformism to his electors. Frank Marcus remarked during Wilson's premiership of this period that something he had in common with other playwrights of his generation was a disillusionment with the Wilson government, which had been elected in hope (perhaps more than in confidence) and which within a short time had shown itself to be a disappointment.^{45a} On the most direct level of policy this can be seen in Wilson's betrayal of the left-wing principles of his party for those of the right. By January, 1966, Jo Grimond was able to call Wilson "a much better Conservative leader than Mr. Heath",⁴⁶ whilst by the following year cabinet ministers themselves were beginning to hint at discontent at the rate of reform in many areas of policy. Peter Shore complained of the obstructiveness of the civil service to reform, and in doing so put the press in mind of the question: "has there been any radical change since the Autumn of 1964?"⁴⁷ Many supporters of the Labour movement felt that the only changes occurring were against the interests of the working class. Of particular concern was the Trade Union policies,

culminating in In Place of Strife, but already stridently criticised before the election of the second Wilson government. Frank Cousins would eventually resign over the issue, which caused The Spectator to remark: "Certainly the left agrees that from time to time it may be necessary to sit down with the devil. But need the government give the impression of enjoying his company so much?"⁴⁸ Foreign policy would also be criticised, particularly with regard to Vietnam. The tacit support of the Labour Government for the American intervention caused continued criticism, with particularly savage editorials coming from traditionally supportive areas of the press. The New Statesman, for example, said of Mr. George Brown's appointment to the Foreign Office "Mr. Brown has lost no time in excelling his predecessor [Michael Stewart] as an LBJ trained poodle [...] this servile apologia [Brown's assurance that only military targets were being bombed in North Vietnam] made a fitting prelude to Brown's absurd peace initiative".⁴⁹ The incident referred to was Wilson's and Brown's attempts early in 1967 to reconcile the Russians and the Americans in order to allow a withdrawal to be negotiated without humiliation to US Forces, a debacle which led even Brown to admit "that we looked about as foolish as intermediaries as anyone could look"⁵⁰ There were similar disappointments over South Africa, since under Wilson trade links with the white minority government grew, rather than diminishing⁵¹, and even the sale of arms continued until 1967, when a public and damaging split in cabinet forced Wilson to reverse an arms deal with Pretoria.⁵² Wilson was also quick to forget his links with CND and his earlier unilateralism.⁵³

Mrs. Wilson's Diary is evidence of how sharp the satiric attacks upon Wilson over his latently right-wing outlook could

become. There is, for example, a particularly acidic reference to telegrams of congratulations which Harold received from "gentlemen in the city and shipowners" (p.59) on his television speech condemning the Seamen's strike. He is invariably seen associating with such bodies as "the annual dinner of the worshipful company of moneygrabbers and pursefilchers at the guildhall" (p.51), rather than with the Labour Party. Indeed, Harold is upset by the prospect of more Labour MPs after the 1966 election, lamenting "Heaven knows it is difficult enough to conduct the affairs of government with a majority of three, let alone a hundred and fifty, considering that they will all be anarchists and trotskyites" (p.43).

Elsom cites Mrs. Wilson's Diary as evidence of the "softness" of satirists upon the Wilson government⁵⁴, yet if this is the case, it is difficult to see why the play was banned by the Lord Chamberlain when it originally applied for a licence to perform in 1967 and could not be performed until after the abolition of the censor. The rumours of Wilson's anxiety over the attack upon his public image represented by the review are confirmed by some accounts of the period.⁵⁵ What was so alarming to Wilson is perhaps the very blackness of the attacks upon him. Whereas many earlier forms of satire, such as That Was The Week That Was, which Elsom cites as more savage, tend to concentrate upon the personal competency and fitness to govern of such figures as Lord Home,⁵⁶ Mrs. Wilson's Diary discusses Wilson in terms of actual anomalies of principle and practice, of theory and action. It also, as I have pointed out, attacks his personality, but vilification of the hypocrisy of the government is much more to the fore. The play has this in common with most of the black comedy "canon" of 1964 to 1974. Mrs.

Wilson's Diary, as it exists in print, usually pulls up only marginally short of the mordant toying with the dead⁵⁷ which informed many of the plays of its period, such as Early Morning, which had also been banned in 1967.

The satirical revue also has in common with the other plays discussed a strong element of "buffo" in its humour. There is, for example, the episode in which Harold and Mary visit the Royal Family at Balmoral (pp.11-16), which develops into a series of farcical scenes. Particularly comical are the episodes in which Harold and the Duke of Edinburgh become drunk and fall about singing the Eton boating song together and where an inebriated Mr. Wilson accidentally (?) loses his way to the toilet amongst the corridors of the castle and finishes up accidentally pissing upon the Prince of Wales' nanny. It is not until the end of the visit that the blackness of the farce is brought sharply into focus by Harold who, on the way back from Balmoral after a positive rave-up, turns to Mary and remarks "Y'know Gladys, I haven't much time for all that old school tie paraphernalia" (p.16).

In the laying bare of cynical motives and self-serving strategies, Mrs. Wilson is structurally as indispensable as the "innocent" of any black farce. Her capacity to overhear and misinterpret is much like that of say, Geraldine in What The Butler Saw, for she represents the figure of moral status quo and hierarchy which is crucial in leading audience response. Her power for a kind of aural/interpretive malapropism creates much of the comic focus of the "Diary". One instance of this device occurs after the death of the speaker, when the ensuing by-election threatens to cut Harold's majority from three to one but Harold, in demonstrating his usual buoyant over-confidence

becomes drunk with Jim Callaghan and sings "something about the working class can kiss my heart" (p.7), a joke which Ingrams and Wells seemed to admire so much, that they repeat it later, this time even more appropriately, in Harold's celebration of the Hull North by-election win (p.35). This particular victory had seen the admission to parliament of a particularly left-wing member, and induced Wilson to call the 1966 general election. The outrageous cynicism of Wilson the self-publicist (at one point he comments of a "hot" issue "I will ask Cecil King's advice and then make a decision" - p.30) is revealed by Mary's mishearing, when she listens on an extension to Harold asking Sir Robert Menzies to act as his emissary at the height of the Rhodesian crisis:

Harold explained that he was wondering whether Sir Robert would be prepared to come to Rhodesia with him. "Pull the other one sport," said Sir Robert, "what about the Vietnam jaunt? I suppose this is another of your publicity stunts". "Exactly" said Harold, "but provided I can tell the nation on television tomorrow night that I have been on the phone to you, all will be well". Sir Robert then became rather abusive, and called Harold a "jokey Pom", which I took to be a French expression, before ringing off. (p.17)

Left-wing politics, in the hands of this man, are a sham, a performance. This sense of performance, of obsession with appearance, is something which is stressed in the portrayal of radical politicians of the period, and lends itself to the dramatic vehicle of farce. In Little Malcolm and His Struggle Against The Eunuchs, the metaphor is brought to its logical end, since the entire play consists of a series of performances,

where Scrawdyke acts out his fantasies, of which nothing ever comes, except violence to his own allies.

The overwhelming impression left by Wilson, and Labour consensus politics generally at this time, was one of extreme cynicism, represented sometimes by the figure of Wilson himself, and sometimes by an attitude of pragmatism amongst radicals, which was often extended to its logical conclusion as, once again, in Little Malcolm and His Struggle Against The Eunuchs, where hyperbolical syllogism is a comic device frequently associated with political themes:

WICK: A say, Mal, between you an' me, when we get t'power, what are goin't'be our aims. A mean our real aims? What a' we goin't'do with it?

SCRAWDYKE: Between ourselves?

WICK: Yeh.

SCRAWDYKE: Nothing!

WICK: Nothing?

SCRAWDYKE: We want power purely for its own sake.

WICK: To enjoy it.

SCRAWDYKE: We shan't pursue any policy for its intrinsic value.

WICK: What we do with it doesn't matter.

SCRAWDYKE: In that sense we do nothing.

WICK: But there'll be plenty activity.

SCRAWDYKE: Purely arbitrary activity.

WICK: Perverse activity.

SCRAWDYKE: Strictly for giggles.

WICK: Our giggles.

SCRAWDYKE: The Absurd State.

WICK: Absurdity with vengeance . (p.77)

The Wilsonian ethic is utilized by the children of his age, and elsewhere by a brazen, self-serving evocation of Wilson himself, as in Trixie and Baba, where "the whole country's going to the dogs" (p.20), but the adoration of Wilson seems only to accelerate the process. Whenever Baba quotes Wilson it is only to demean, albeit inadvertently, his new age. Like Wilson himself, Baba has used CND for his own gain in its flourishing period of the early sixties:

DENNIS: Eh? I like these - CND - are you CND?

BABA: CND - CN bloody D - don't talk to me about ^{the} CND
mate - I've marched - we've marched - eh I took a
thousand pendants on that bloody march - how many did
we sell - fifty - the movement's dead - It's all
bloody Peace in Vietnam now isn't it?

DENNIS: Can't you change your line?

BABA: I'm not changing my bloody line - start Peace
in Vietnam buttons - next thing you know there'll be
a truce. (pp.7-8)

He retains this attitude throughout the play, explaining the demise of the first phase of CND by his attitude to that organisation:

BABA:[on telephone]: Yes yes I do sell CND pendants -
how many gross do you want? One - gross? One-pendant
- get stuffed the movement's dead - dead! No I am not
a cynic I am a business man . (p.41)

The perversity of Baba's relationship with his political hero is emphasised by his constant allusion to him in order to evade household tasks and business responsibilities:

"BABA: This business is on the brink - the whole
country - It's forward or disaster - do you think

Wilson - do you think the Prime Minister has time
to throw out reeking cabbage ...

TRIXIE: You're not the Prime Minister ...

BABA: Export or die! Export or die! That cabbage
stays there until you throw it out". (p.16)

This kind of reductive absurdity invariably seems to involve one of the current Wilsonian shibboleths. The "Export or Die" pitch has other echoes throughout the play, such as Baba's holding up of one of the businesses last remaining pound notes and proclaiming his "confidence in the pound" (p.57), something which would put the audience in mind of Wilson's slogan for devaluation which had occurred in the Autumn of 1967 and was, at the time of the play's first performance a year later widely tipped to be repeated.

Baba's ambiguous affinity with Wilson is ironically contextualised by Trixie, who reveals that despite Baba's claim never to have lost faith in "the new man" during the dark days of Tory rule, that Baba had in fact suffered severe doubts about Wilson (p.61), particularly over the proposed nationalisation of steel (p.62).

The play's structure is an elaborate entropic process, a winding-down whose most important comic device is the sick joke, particularly as it is used in connection with Trixie's rich mother, and Baba's dying father. After a long series of farcical scenes involving Baba's desperate jealousy about his oversexed wife's flirtations with her derelict lover, Galileo, and with Dennis, his young assistant, the play's conventional structure becomes more evident towards the finale. Trixie and Baba is typical of the programme of the Royal Court, where it was first performed in August of 1968, at the end of a summer in

which the Royal Court audiences had been subjected to even more black comedy than in previous years. Where it is atypical is its peculiar sense of uneasy reconciliation and resolution at curtain. In the climactic scene Baba seems to be about to finally act upon his plan to extort the funds from his farcically unproductive business and leave Trixie. Sadly, these funds, he discovers, have already been extorted by Trixie, as part of her complex neurosis (pp.89-90), which leaves her hiding in cupboards for fear of traffic noise (pp.20-21) and makes her "suicide prone" (p.79). The business is found to be bankrupt. The audience is led to suspect that it has been throughout, but the characters are influenced by the delusions of grandeur which are fostered by Baba, who recites Wilsonian shibboleths (another example is his endorsement of "building up stocks"- p.57), thereby bouncing his followers along with the celebrated overconfidence of his mentor. The suggestion of allegory of a British people living on its imperial past and a mythical future is a part of this theme. Baba suffers a massive disillusionment with his Labourite values. "Here you see a broken man...Export or die - yes Harold - I know the price - well you won't find my ^{ruddy} name in the Financial Times", he cries, as he collapses into despair (p.90), only to be quickly revived by the news that his father has changed his will, forgiving Baba his past profligacies, and then obligingly died, giving his son the added bonus of "an economy" for his business (p.91). After this scene, the ultimate (pp.92-93) is one of new beginnings, of the end of a journey to self awareness. We are greeted with sunlight, and the beginning of a restructuring of the old situation, with Baba now reliant on his own father's money, rather than that of Trixie's mother, his business opening in a

new line, and his abandonment of his plan (although perhaps not his desire) to leave Trixie. What is to the forefront of Baba's reconstruction of his personal realities is his abandonment, after the penultimate scene's catharsis, of his championship of Wilson:

BABA: And so, comrades, our saga finishes - it's alright for Harold to talk but it's not that easy is it - we're trying again with lampshades and - sticking to home markets (p.92)

Symbolically, the others have gone "to bury the old man", and Baba has been left to sit with his baby son. But the image of rebirth is subjected to a final sick joke. Baba has been left two tasks - to put the baby into its cot and the duck (for their celebration of company and family solvency) into the oven - he discovers that he has in fact put the duck into the cot. Antrobus lets his audience "off the hook" by allowing a healthy pause before Baba discovers he has forgotten to light the oven, containing the baby, and as Trixie and Dennis enter, we finish at the point of a celebration, a traditional restoration of order, through the unorthodox medium of the abandonment of the status quo (Wilsonism) rather than its endorsement.

Trixie and Baba is instructive in its ready identification of new forms of political vision, which had a few years before been seen as progressive, as the very source of the misery of the working classes. This theme is highlighted by oblique, pinteresque, rather glum exchanges between the characters, who seem to gesture off, wordlessly and helplessly, for a form of guidance. Baba is not alone in the ignorance which leads to the sense of malaise which hangs over the characters:

BABA: What did you used to do?

DENNIS: Wh?

BABA: Like - before...

DENNIS: Oh I was in industry...

BABA: Heavy or light...

DENNIS: Oh they wouldn't tell me...

BABA: You asked?

DENNIS: I don't think I did...

BABA: What were you making?

DENNIS: Factories...

BABA: Factories - ask a silly question...did you have much industrial relationship?

DENNIS: Oh err aye like - one or two... (p.22)

Trixie and Baba is by no criteria a great play, primarily because of its quite capable author's desire to indulge in black grotesquerie, even when, as in the final scene, the sick joke tends to obscure the thematic aim of a scene. It does, however, amount to a good example of its type in its implicit connection with sickness of mind and perversion of political vision leading quite directly to Britain's governmental crisis.

The cynicism of working-class characters over left wing solutions is matched by the attitudes of middle class characters. Whereas the characters of Trixie and Baba seem to be half aware of their cynicism, and half victims of it, those of Eveling's Come and Be Killed (1967)⁵⁸ are more articulate and more able to identify paradoxes. The conflicts involved in "schizophrenic conscience" as the character Jim puts it, is one which will become more familiar to the reader as the thesis progresses:

BETTINA: I thought you didn't believe in capital punishment.

JIM: I don't believe in it. But I feel very strongly that bastards like that [Heath, the acid-bath murderer] should be hung, drawn and quartered. It makes me very uneasy.

BETTINA: Well, I'm glad they stopped all that, anyway.

JIM: Yes. It's a good thing. I have all the right beliefs, you know. Yanks go home, ban the bomb, down with Polaris, coloured people...but my feelings reveal themselves as definitely on the side of the brute.

BETTINA: You've got a split personality (p.23)

The realisation of Jim's latent fascism occurs later, when he and Jerry become intoxicated, and he begins to attack his friend over his self indulgent "suffering" over Vietnam (pp.63-64), and goes on to attack the whole concept of bourgeois liberalism with a kind of fervent New-Right passion:

JIM: And what have we, eh?

(JERRY *shrugs*)

JIM: I'll tell you, a society dedicated to the proposition that the lame, the halt and the blind shall inherit the earth, a society fit for pooves and spastics to live in. (p.65)

What is apparent here, is not so much the hypocrisy of the "ought people", as Jim calls them (p.96), as the despair and nihilism of those who attack them. As Jerry remarks of his friend "All your badness is the outcome of a sort of puzzled goodness" (p.66). The remark is saved from becoming a rather jarring aphorism by Eveling judiciously having Jerry add: "(*Very pleased with his remark*) That's the most perceptive thing I've ever said".

After his assertion that the nature of comedy and farce had changed in the sixties, which I quoted in my introduction, Gareth Lloyd Evans goes on to contend, indeed complain, that a great many of the new style of comic plays were allegorical in intent, and that their most notable feature was their "representativeness", rather than their concentration on character. He cites two examples of this syndrome in Terson's Zigger Zagger and Nichols' The National Health⁵⁹, both of which will be examined in the final chapter. As I have hinted earlier, allegory plays a significant part in the portrayal of political institutions in Britain of the 1960s. Belcher's Luck sees Britain as a decaying aristocratic estate in which the newly risen privileged, young working class (Victor) allies with the traditional middle class (Helen) in preventing the conventional working class and peasantry (Belcher and Lucy) from inheriting the reigns of power, still held by a dying aristocracy (Catesby). I have said enough about Trixie and Baba, The Houses by The Green, And Did Those Feet? and Three Men for Colverton to indicate that similar structures would be easily observable, whilst any number of other plays, Up Against It, The Little Mrs. Foster Show, Cregan's Transcending (1966) and Eveling's The Lunatic, The Secret Sportsman and the Woman Next Door (1968) are simply the first to come to mind amongst similarly allegorical black comedies. In fact Mercer's play is probably a poor example, since it brings a greater degree of psychological depth to its characters than the other plays mentioned. But even so, in Belcher's Luck the psychological idiosyncracies of each character is examined in terms of its representativeness. By 2

this I mean that (for example) Belcher's conflict with his son is explained in terms of his anger over Victor's creation of political precedents - his anger is typified by his attack on Victor's failure to recognise hierarchy, ("They're born to rule, and we're born to screw 'em for all we can get whilst respecting their rightful place in the scheme of things" - p.36) which is itself a stereotypical grievance. Mercer, then, allows his characters only as much psychological verisimilitude as will contribute to the abstract dialectical scheme of the play.

If a decaying aristocrat's estate is one means of analogising Britain of this period, a more popular method is to see the country as a dilapidated public school. The public school is, throughout the period, a satirical context for a play - in Carey Harrison's Twenty Six Efforts at Pornography (1967)⁶⁰ the archaic language set up by the private educational system is cut down by having communications between Sullivan and Lawton reduced to the level of the inarticulate by the antiquated jargon used at public schools (p.19), whilst in David Hare's Slag (1970)⁶¹ the attack upon the "sexual revolution" is placed within the particular glasshouse of a public school. It would also be remiss of me not to mention If, Lindsay Anderson's film of 1968, written by David Sherwin. The film is frequently said to be a mouthpiece for the student revolutionaries of 1968 (it was recently screened as part of Channel Four's 1968/88 retrospective season) although Anderson himself has revealed that the screenplay and pre-production were already completed in 1966, and the film was not intended to make a conscious connection with the young Parisian rioters of May 1968.⁶² Whatever the political pedigree of If, it certainly makes a

satirical foray against the new technocratic age of Wilson with the figure of the liberal, meritocratic Headmaster. He is full of Wilsonian rhetoric:

Britain today is a powerhouse of ideas, experiments and imagination. On everything from pop music to pig-breeding, from atom power stations to mini skirts, and that's the challenge we've got to meet.

He is comparable to Roy Jenkins in his liberal facade, exemplified by his championing of long-haired boys against the establishment, whilst at the same time uncomfortably justifying the privileges of his charges. In the speech quoted above, he also apologises for the "silly customs" associated with the school, which he is honour bound to uphold, although his supposed progressiveness in teaching such subjects as business studies, is intended to redeem him from the ranks of the old style Tories around him. In the end, one feels a certain elation at his death at the hands of Travis' girlfriend - he is shot in the middle of a pacifying speech, claiming to "understand" the rebels.⁶³

The parody of the Wilsonian outlook is still more pronounced in Miniatures, where the personality of the headmaster is central to the allegorising of Britain as a shabby, outmoded public school. As the two representative pupils, Simpson and Janet, attempt in vain to find effective teaching and leadership, those in authority are either obsessed by careerism, living in a fantasy world, or completely in despair of progress. The headmaster, David Cornwallis, stands over the school, dictating the new professional ethics, and while education is neglected, he dispenses opinions upon the earth shattering issue of whether gowns should be worn by staff.

On this issue, David is quoted as saying that:

...the wearing of gowns is not authority but mummery, and that as intelligent and more than intelligent adults, we should eschew such medieval theatricalia (p.18)

But David's progressive vision, his rhetoric of the shedding of the past, is more directly borne out by his avowed desire to modernise. Yet this scheme seems doomed to failure from the outset. The magnitude of his task is illustrated by the first scene in which he appears:

DAVID: Since the school opened, I've had only one thought, and that is to bring the buildings as up to date as they should have been when we started. This [the building of the new science labs] means we're now only ten years out of date.

JOYCE: Splendid!

DAVID: Thank you Joyce. It's a modest achievement I suppose, but something (p.22)

The Wilsonian parallel, in the concentration on modernisation and science in particular, is obvious enough,⁶⁴ and David is himself, a scientist (p.20). But just how modest is his achievement is illustrated shortly:

DAVID: [...] Well, to the science labs.

ALL: Hear, Hear, well done, yes.

DAVID: Long may they last.

AMY: Surely they'll be out of date in ten years.

DAVID: What? Why?

AMY: Progress, David.

DAVID: Oh yes. Yes, of course. Progress.

(He laughs, partly with discomfort, partly with good humour) (p.24)

Later in the play, the science block becomes increasingly discredited, as inadequacies are found each time it is introduced (pp.31-31, p.39). Further, as ^{to} the moral question of whether or not the promotion of science was within itself a formula for societal health, Cregan puts the negative case in the figure of the science master, Harry Clopton, whose taunt at Mike, a language teacher, "The practical philistine always wins, MacAlpine. You'd better get used to it" (p.34), is characteristic of his insensitive attitude to teaching, of which he seems to think as a war against his charges.

In any case, archaic ritual finally triumphs, and in the last scene Joe Johnson, the kleptomaniac art teacher who has been exposed, and reluctantly dismissed, diminishing by one the number of the school's progressives, attempts, in a scene of Beckettian farce, to hang himself, while, simultaneously, Reg, the old-style conservative (although, in the manner of old-style conservatives of the latter 'sixties, he refuses the label while at the same time laying down patently conservative principles - p.51) announces his victory in the great gown debate (pp.73-76). The fatal flaw in the progressive scheme is seen to be in the character of the headmaster. Like Wilson, egotism is as much a part of his vision as idealism, and this leads to promotion of supporters rather than individuals of talent, both exemplified by his exchange with Joyce and Amy:

DAVID: [...] These plans have been designed to pull this school further forward than any other school in the county. They constitute a vision of the future.

Amy, there *is* a vision of the future?

AMY: Yes, David, I'm sure there is.

JOYCE: Of course there is! How can you say there isn't?

DAVID: She hasn't.

JOYCE: But it's awful the way some people are so slack and unimaginative.

DAVID: She's not unimaginative.

AMY: Thank you.

DAVID: I appointed her.

JOYCE: Yes, of course. I'm so sorry.

DAVID: She's very enthusiastic about my plans, aren't you Amy?

AMY: Yes, they're very pretty. (pp.27-28)

David's defence of his colleagues on the modernising side of the school as being acceptable because they were appointed by him, is repeated later with reference to Joyce herself (p.66).

As if there is not sufficient evidence of an implicit comparison to the Wilsonian style of government, there is also the total inability of the headmaster to establish authority in the school. Not only is he dictated to by the conservative forces within the school, but also by Janet (p.39) and Simpson (pp.46-50). The episode involving the "punishment" of Simpson for the alleged theft of a record-player lid (in fact, one of Joe Johnson's efforts) is particularly instructive. Simpson catches the headmaster in a moment of particular despair, and he reveals to his student that he is often unable to come to terms with the advances he is meant to endorse (p.45):

SIMPSON: It never occurs to us that you don't know what you're doing.

DAVID: I often know what I'm doing and when I don't I usually cover up pretty well (p.46)

David claims not to know his course of action over Simpson's supposed misdemeanour:

SIMPSON: Actually, you know what you're going to do.

DAVID: The wrong thing.

SIMPSON: One doesn't see how you can avoid it. The pattern seems complete.

DAVID: It seems overriding. In science it would be overriding. (p.48)

So it is decided that Simpson, despite his ostensible innocence is to be punished. But even this, David is unable to carry out. He is, in a piece of disorientating stage business, positioned by Simpson to cane the boy, yet is unable to make himself do so - he then confronts his student with a series of orders which are systematically disobeyed, and he is finally left lamenting "The wrong thing. Always the wrong bloody thing!" (pp.49-50). David is meant to be a pragmatist, favouring "the fluid approach" (p.39) but the only outcome of this is a sharpened sense of "cabinet" competition. Ultimately, David seems to question ideas of progress and enlightenment, questioning the whole purpose of education (p.48), and rejecting social determinism with the belief that "No-one ever stops being bad" (p.44).

The final effect of the play is of a microcosm of a Britain which can neither shed the burden of its past, nor approach a vision of the future with any confidence. Mike MacAlpine's recurrent lamentation, "I don't enjoy any of the daily features of my life, I'm overwhelmed" (p.37), is one which makes a connection with such representative characters of the period as Wick in (Little Malcolm and His Struggle Against The Eunuchs), Dennis (Trixie and Baba), Ian McTurk (Up Against It), Victor (Belcher's Luck) and seemingly innumerable other characters, in

plays of this kind. The sense of ennui which overtakes Joe Johnson at the curtain evokes a feeling of comic despair which can be seen as a direct result of the victory of the confrontational conservatism of Clopton and the high Tory spleen of Reg and Ray over the pragmatic but ultimately ineffective progressiveness of David Cornwallis. The centrality of Miniatures to the political vision of the black comedy in Britain of the Wilson Prime Ministership should not be underrated, for whatever its relatively forgotten status today, it was clearly a highly-regarded play in its time, as is evinced by its cast (including George Devine as David, Lindsay Anderson as Reg, Nicol Williamson as Joe, Bryan Pringle as Clopton, as well as Graham Crowden and Jon Laurimore), perhaps the strongest that the Royal Court produced in 1965.

Another star cast of equal importance, but quite different political implications than that of the Royal Court, was one which included John Gielgud, Paul Eddington, Dorothy Reynolds, a youthful Anthony Andrews and the author himself. Alan Bennett's Forty Years On⁶⁵ (1968), bears a similar vision of contemporary history as Miniatures, although its view of the past is only "black" in parts. The play portrays Albion House, a dilapidated English Public school where obviously allegorical status is not confined merely to its name, at a point where its old headmaster, a distinguished but rather dotty old Edwardian gentleman is about to reluctantly stand aside for a young and progressive master, Mr. Franklin, who intends to attack the old institutions and bring about sweeping changes, and new forms of social identity. Franklin has a smooth image, and is popular with the boys (p.30). Although he is prepared (for example) to brand the captain of the rugger team a "privileged great lout"

(p.52), his conflict with the headmaster eventually proves to be more about the seizure of power than its enlightened use. In the end, progress becomes a nonsense, and Franklin is seen as a part of the establishment. Bennett's polished wit lends a brilliance to the exchanges between Franklin and the retiring headmaster which brings to the fore a feeling of foreboding about Britain's "signposts for the sixties". Of the school play (once again, the performance is structured as a play within a play) which propounds the vision of Mr. Franklin by being either unkind or patronising towards the figures of the imperial past (even the Guardian's critic, Phillip Hope-Wallace was moved to observe that "the kind of rough justice dispensed to the memories of T.E. Lawrence and Neville Chamberlain is pretty savage")⁶⁶ the headmaster asks:

HEADMASTER: Would it be impossibly naive and old-fashioned of me to ask what it is you are trying to accomplish in this impudent charade?

FRANKLIN: You could say we are trying to shed the burden of the past.

HEADMASTER: Shed it? Why must we shed it? Why not shoulder it? Memories are not shackles, Franklin, they are garlands.

FRANKLIN: We're too tied to the past. We want to be free to look to the future. The future comes before the past.

HEADMASTER: Nonsense. The future comes after the past. Otherwise it couldn't be the future.[...] It's very easy to be daring and outspoken, Franklin, but once you're at the helm the impetus will pass. Authority is a leaden cope. You will be left behind, however

daring and outspoken you are. [...] One thing at least I can say. While I have been headmaster, Albion House has always been a going concern. Whether that will continue I am not sure. It depends on you, Franklin. But I am not sure of anything nowadays. I am lost. I am adrift. Everywhere one looks, decadence. I saw a bishop with a moustache the other day.

FRANKLIN: It had to come. (pp.69-70)

It would be simple enough to have Franklin and the Headmaster, the two real protagonists of the play, played as stereotypes - Franklin as the slick, sullenly facetious "new man" and the Headmaster as a cratchety, Polonius-like old duffer. ~~Indeed to some~~ extent, both are certainly types since, as I have stated, psychological depth is simply not needed in such allegorical farces as these. But there is something like a real pathos in the Headmaster's speech, which is only upset by the thirteenth stroke of the clock, and Franklin's instant put-down. The same treatment is meted out to Franklin, and in this way Bennett, whilst expressing a similar view of Britain's crossroad as the other dramatists discussed, seems less concerned with alienation in discussing, quite even - handedly, the possibilities of British politics.

Offended by the lavatory humour of the play within the play, the Headmaster's confrontations with Franklin become increasingly direct. This exchange points up both his own High Toryism and Franklin's ultimate political paradox:

HEADMASTER: All these years I have been at Albion House, years which have seen the decline of authority, the decay of standards, the slow collapse of all I

hold most dear. And now this. Mark my words, when
a society has to ^{resort} _^ to the lavatory for its humour,
the writing is on the wall.

FRANKLIN: You are a different generation, Headmaster.

HEADMASTER: So are you, Franklin. However daring
and outspoken you are, to the boys you are a master,
and all your swearing and your smut, your silk
handkerchiefs and your suede shoes can't alter that.

We're in the same boat, Franklin, you and I. (p.80)

And so they were, in this year more than any other. The Labour party, after years in the wilderness had come to power as a young people's party, only to see young people reject them as a part of the establishment. Forty Years On was first performed in October, 1968, a few months after the high-water mark of young people's disenchantment with established politics in the twentieth century so far, and could not help but reflect upon the irony which mocked the "permissive" government of the latter sixties. Returning to the Headmaster, Bennett's view of the politics of Home, three years after the rise to power of Heath's Tory meritocracy, is telling. Once again, the metaphor is fairly direct. As Home and his kind were supposed to be leaving the stage of British politics, their unwillingness to do so is made concrete by Bennett:

(*The Headmaster is wandering about getting in
everyone's way and looking a bit lost*)

[FRANKLIN]: I want everyone not in the opening scene
off the stage now. Headmaster, you're not in the
opening scene, are you?

HEADMASTER: No (*But makes no attempt to go*) (p.32)

This attitude causes confusion to the boys:

FRANKLIN: Who's mucking about with the flaming lights? You touch that switch again, Crabtree, and I'll flay the bloody hide off you. What will I do?

CRABTREE: (*On the microphone*) Flay the bloody hide of me, sir.

FRANKLIN: Right.

HEADMASTER: And don't swear, boy. It shows a lack of vocabulary. (p.33)

The headmaster's principle of the "via media" is lampooned ("MATRON: Headmaster, I wonder if I might sit down and paint your face/HEADMASTER: I don't see why not, provided you exercise restraint" - p.34), as is his more autocratic manifestations of conservatism, such as his upholding of censorship ("I'm all in favour of free expression, provided it's kept rigidly under control" - p.80). His own canny observations of boys as "conservative creatures" with a love of ritual (p.32) are not contradicted, but he himself is made to appear absurd by his rigid dedication to the past, which is finally as damaging as Franklin's blind groping for the future. If Benedict Nightingale's accusation of "a disingenuous crypto-toryism"⁶⁷ is unjustified, it is certainly also true that Bennett has no relish for the new society. Forty Years On is an intriguing play in that its undeniable blackness in places, such as its rather morbid dealing with Flanders in 1918 (p.71) and a kangaroo-court trial of Neville Chamberlain (pp.86-91) are mixed with a kind of light comedy, thick with a syrup of nostalgia. The rather unusual mix led, perhaps, to the varied interpretations the play received from contemporary critics.⁶⁸ The confused world into which the old Tory fades away, while the new left-winger is ironically made to play "a Tory MP, upper class, mild,

scholarly and disillusioned" (p.36) is left finally to a mellow, inconclusive, uncertain final speech at the lectern:

LECTERN: To let. A valuable sight at the cross-roads of the world. At present on offer to European clients. Outlying portions of the estate already disposed of to sitting tenants. Of some historical and period interest. Some alterations and improvements necessary. (p.96)

That this play, as well as most of the plays discussed thus far should have been first performed in 1968 is not surprising since in this year the troubles associated with the Wilson premiership reached a head with the resignation of George Brown. It seems rather neat that the opening of a play which would come to be regarded as a classic British Black Comedy of its era should occur only a few weeks after Brown's resignation over the night of 14th and 15th March, 1968, an event which in turn represented the climax of a long period of press speculation about the party's future under Wilson, and the need to find alternative leaders. Bond's Early Morning had in fact found its germ in 1965, but it had taken Bond over two years to complete,⁶⁹ the first six months being centred completely upon the metaphor of the siamese twins, George and Arthur, which is so important to the play,⁷⁰ and the final draft was completed in 1967, before Brown's final resignation, which occurred as one of those precious coincidences, comparable to the broadcasting of a Conservative Party election broadcast immediately before first telecast of Vote, Vote, Vote for Nigel Barton. What the completion of Early Morning did coincide with, was the earlier

speculation about the leadership, and a general collapse of faith in the government, which one of its senior cabinet ministers described as "the nadir of the government's fortunes and the [period of] maximum unhappiness and dissension within the Labour Party".⁷¹ It was also in 1967, with a culmination the following year, that Cecil King began his campaign for a national government, which caused so much anxiety for the future of parliamentary democracy in Britain. In cartoons of the year 1967, Harold Wilson is portrayed as avoiding a ghost of National Government, summoned by King,⁷² whose "Wilson must go" campaign in the Daily Mirror, Sunday Mirror and People would eventually lead to his own ousting as chairman of IPC in 1968, for being obsessed with politics. King bannered a number of calls for Wilson's resignation, culminating in May, 1968⁷³, and continually called for a form of non-party government to replace the existing system. This would establish strong government to steer the country through its national crisis - not such a radical move, according to upholders of the idea, in times of consensus politics. Criticism of the most ferocious kind of this idea came from intellectuals as early as January, 1967.⁷⁴

In Early Morning, we are presented, from the outset, with "the grotesque microcosm of the political State",⁷⁵ which Hirst describes, by the initial plotting, in a corridor of Windsor Castle, of Albert and Disraeli, who intend to overthrow the leader of the country and their own social class, Queen Victoria. What is striking about the initial scene, is its utter topicality. The Lord Chamberlain gave Early Morning the honour of being the last play to be banned in its entirety by his office, returning the manuscript to the Royal Court with the simple remark that "His Lordship would not allow it"⁷⁶,

presumably, according to Worth, because of its "tremendous libel on eminent Victorians".⁷⁷ But the scene is an amazingly thin piece of analogising for modern society. Bond's use of anachronism in Early Morning has been widely discussed, particularly in terms of the political modernity of its language.⁷⁸ But beyond being obviously relevant to modern society, the play is genuinely topical. The first scene presents a situation in which a leader is to be ousted by her own party (indeed, her own family,) in order that a careerist may seize power in a time of national crisis, when the leader has become most unpopular.⁷⁹ The very first two lines of dialogue tell us as much, and the parallel to Wilson, especially at the time of the play's writing and performance, is clear enough to an audience which had been subjected to newspaper coverage of identical events at their breakfast tables over the past few months. When Albert explains his political alibis for the crimes about to be perpetrated against the equally corrupt Victoria in scene two, he cites what Coult calls "the height of progressive thought, a new scientific, trading spirit ousting the absolute Royal power".⁸⁰ But, more than this, while using the Victorian visions of Empire, Bond seems to point to Mr. Wilson's new world, where "young men will have an enormous amount to do"⁸¹, and where there is more than a hint of Wilson's Kennedy complex, of "idealism without illusion": "ALBERT: I want to build. The people are strong. They want to be used to build empires and railways and factories, to trade and convert and establish law and order" (p.141). Arthur can only reply that "The trouble with the world is it's run by politicians", adding, in deploring the conspiratorial conditions under which he lives: "I have no rights - not even the

right to surrender. I'm sick of secrets and arguments" (p.142).

After the first two scenes, Bond sets out to address some specific social issues in the contemporary/Victorian milieu which he has sought to create. Having created a sense of "background" within an historically specific framework, he proceeds to attack, in the third, the sexual hypocrisy of the time, and the by-product of that hypocrisy, the office of the Lord Chamberlain. It is here that the epigrammatic style of the black farce begins to make itself felt and it is to two characters of structural, almost choric, rather than central significance, that the responsibility falls. The two characters are made noteworthy by Bond's *dramatis personae*, since of the fifteen speaking parts only these two are not designated specific ages. The character of the Lord Chamberlain, while the other characters are all given ages between sixteen and fifty, is referred to simply as "old" (p.138) This seems to designate the Lord Chamberlain's archaic role in Victorian and, by implication, contemporary society. The character is a cardboard cut-out, a vicious old man whose office, as well as his character, are seen to belong to the old Britain. Whenever the Lord Chamberlain speaks, it is in defence of a glorious golden age of the past, mouthing traditional values in a context which renders them risible. For example, at the height of the violent rebellion in Regent's park, he is seen desperately brushing down his ceremonial robes, and assuring anyone who will listen: "If you don't go into battle neat and clean you never win. One guardsman with polished boots is worth fifty American rockets" (p.163). In the same scene, he speaks the mind of Britain's conservative, middle-brow majority of the

day by saying of a violent coup, no less, that "Uncertainty always leads to ineffectiveness" (p.163). The Lord Chamberlain is accompanied in scene three by Lord Mennings, a man of the new society, described simply as "young" (p.138) and one who is primarily concerned with the morals of society. It seems more than likely that Bond intended to suggest the most progressive of the Law Lords, Lord Denning in Lord Mennings, for he, still more than Lord Longford (who himself was portrayed as a progressive at the time)⁸² was most concerned with sexual practices in modern Britain. Denning had, of course, been the man who had investigated the Profumo Affair and its broader implications, and would, in tabling his findings, somewhat pour oil on the troubled waters of the private morality of public figures issue.⁸³ Even in doing this, Denning had been criticised, and accused of legally and morally questionable methods of investigation.⁸⁴

The Denning/Mennings figure is seen to be quite prurient from the outset:

MENNINGS: This trial should be a real jazz. Is it true the woman's a lot older than him?

LORD CHAMBERLAIN: Yes.

MENNINGS: You can't get tickets. The black market's sold out.

CHAMBERLAIN: I'm as modern as anyone, but I'm all for holding trials in secret and executions in public. That simplifies government and satisfies the people. We should never have abolished hanging.

It was something to live up to. (p.143)

Mennings' interest in matters sexual is reduced to the flippant by the hip terminology, which in turn counterpoints the "modern

as anyone" Lord Chamberlain. Mennings' sexual hypocrisy is revealed at its fullest level when he dies in a fetishist ecstasy, having been poisoned by drinking drugged champagne from Florence Nightingale's shoe, his death being a farcical contretemps resulting from his snatching the poisoned shoe in a sexual frenzy (VICTORIA: Lord Mennings [...] I'll have you flogged. MENNINGS: Thank you, ma'm; sir. By the shoe owner..." - p.157) from Albert, whose intended victim is Victoria, herself the poisoner of the drink (pp.155-164). Similar sexual hypocrisy is associated with the Lord Chamberlain, whose formality is such that Victoria says to him "Lord Chamberlain, you are like the bishop who always said amen after he'd lain with his wife. She became frigid" (p.156). There is a sense of high farce later, as the Lord Chamberlain, apparently believing Florence Nightingale, who is got up as John Brown, to be a boy, persistently propositions her (pp.175-177).

For me, Early Morning is a very logically structured play, as a good farce should be, and indeed, in its early stages, it is structured almost like a well-made play. As Hirst points out, the narrative structure is very often simply conveyed in terms of epic technique, where characters verbally advance the plot.⁸⁵ The reason, for example, for Florence's walking on and announcing, simply, shockingly and bathetically, "I'm changed. Queen Victoria raped me. I never dreamed that would happen" (p.155), is extrapolation of plot in a rapid, non naturalistic style. The offstage event and its brazen announcement is typical of Bond's almost Senecan expositional approach to the play. By this technique he is able not only to move the plot along breezily without necessarily accelerating the onstage pace of the play (which is carefully manipulated to a series of

farcical climaxes), but also to concentrate upon details of the characters (such as they are) who tend to historically particularise the play. What I mean can be illustrated by the relationship of Disraeli and Gladstone to the general plot development. Disraeli, as the henchman of Albert in the early part of the play, seems to represent the right of the new meritocracy, and Gladstone the left. The whig is, in this fusing of Victoriana and the 1960s, a Wilsonite Labour Party Trade Unionist. He gladly tolerates the situation in which Victoria can remark "Instead of fighting our enemies our armies are putting down strikers and guarding our judges" (p.144). Gladstone attacks Disraeli in the manner which the working classes attacked Heath, for his allegedly effeminate character ("...but I thought no man in a corsit oo' puts 'is 'air in curlers, 'ain good enough for Britain, even for the tories" - p.182) and speaks with pride of his origins in the lower orders and his "moderate" philosophy: "Brothers, yer're now owned by the people's William. Up from the gutter, selfmade, shine like a new penny. Me secret is take it slow. Take it calm. Take it natural. The slower yer go the sooner yer get there" (p.182). Like the vision of the new, pragmatic left, his vision never arises:

GLADSTONE: Remember me motto, boys: moderate it.

What yer spend on beer yer can't spend on riney,
but yer still get yer money's worth if yer take yer
time. William knows. *(The squad laugh)*

LEN: Three cheers for the people's William. 'Ip -
'ip! *(They Cheer)* 'Ip - ip *(They Cheer)* -

GLADSTONE: Two'll do, bretheren. Moderate it. Ready
then. Nice and slow. Never run through the door,

it might be locked...Steady aim...Comfy grip...Wait
on the word...One...Two...Two-an'-a-'alf -
He falls dead. (pp.182-83)

Gladstone is killed off by Bond, as a kind of moral lesson, a cautionary tale in which he leads the mob into a kind of bureaucratic autocracy, an analogy which would have pleased those who disliked Wilson's Labour Party in particular. Gladstone leads the persecution of Len (his own son) by formalising their attacks upon him. He will have none of the old Britain of the earlier government figure, the Lord Chamberlain, but the new man is intent upon harnessing the anarchic will of the mob with a new set of rituals. He prevents the murder of Len by calling for justice to be done (Yer don' wan'a act like common criminals. Trial first, death after; yer get a copy of the book" - p.170), yet his attention to formality is as shallow as that of Victoria, who commanded that Len, who had significantly been originally intended to be convicted in her court, should be not allowed to touch the bible at his swearing-in, since "King James would turn in his grave" (p.148). The emphasis on ritual had thus been less evident in Victoria's court than Gladstone's:

GLADSTONE: So, brother, less 'ear your side. Speak out - we don't tolerate no totalitarian larkins 'ere. Only keep it sharp. We don't want our brothers on overtime. They need their leisure same as you [...]
Now, brothers, don't get excited. Rules are made t' abide by. One foot off the straight an' narre'r an yer never know what yer'll tread in. The proper procedure is vote an amendment. 'Ands up for castration. (p.170)

At the end of this horrific scene, Gladstone announces the

reason for the appalling power he suddenly wields: "Me an' brother Disraeli's formed a National Government" (p.174) - we are brought back, once more, to a threatened reality of the 1960s, a prediction of Cecil King's Britain. Almost immediately, after a brief "catch up" scene in Victoria's camp, a situation of accentuated madness is brought about. Later, the two dead leaders of the National Government are resurrected in order to service Bond's plot - they are once again said to be a "double act", sharing a booking with Florence Nightingale at her brothel, and becoming over-excited at the news of the relief of "Mafekin", they murder Florence (p.201). Once again, this amounts to a destruction of a figure of political hope by the National Government.

What is important about Early Morning, is that it starts from an extremely contemporary and recognisable situation within the context of its outrageous fantasy, and then proceeds to peel away several levels of reality before the truths of the various political promises of Victoria, Albert, Disraeli, Gladstone and so forth are revealed. Bond recommends that three breaks, between scenes five and six, ten and eleven, and fifteen and sixteen, or two breaks, between scenes five and six, and fifteen and sixteen, should divide the play (p.138). The structure of the play, if we take the second scheme, is almost that of a well-made-play, whilst the first is also clearly carefully structured. At each of the possible breaks, the audience is sent to its gin and tonics with a carefully contrived climax, whilst each section is significant in contemporising the play, and its development of an analysis of the possibilities before contemporary Britain. In scenes one to five, Bond sets up a picture of modern Britain in the reformist

sixties, which, despite the Victorian veneer, is governed by the ossified institutions of the past - the monarchy, the House of Lords, the Lord Chamberlain, and so forth. It is carefully explained that there has been progress - a recurrent theme is the death sentence, which is spoken of as having been abolished. Bond began writing Early Morning in the year in which the last man was hung in Britain - in the same year the Murder Act created a suspension in Capital Punishment, despite a massive Conservative movement for its retention. Heath would subsequently face a tremendous fight from the right of his party over his support of suspension, the old right being represented in the play by the views of the Lord Chamberlain.⁸⁶ Indeed in the Britain of Early Morning, it seems to be in the process of reintroduction, a very real possibility for Britain in the late 1960s when the time moved towards the end of the initial five year suspension⁸⁷, and one which attracted a great deal of unhealthy publicity.⁸⁸ It is a world in which the populace watch such films as "Buried Alive on Hampstead Heath" and "Policeman in Black Nylons" (a musical) (p.152) and in which violent murder, even cannibalism are evidently commonplace. At the end of the first section, we see the possible beginning of a new regime in the coup (scene 5) and the figures of Lord Mennings and the Lord Chamberlain are brought less to the fore as the current world is replaced by the near future in a confused post-coup National Government. This section also reaches its climax in the final scene, with the deaths of Gladstone and Disraeli, and the collapse of the National Government. Scene eleven, after the next division, opens on a situation of anarchy and madness, culminating in the death of the entire cast, save Florence, whose death is soon arranged by Gladstone and

Disraeli. The final section is most important as an analysis of what Bond sees as the root of the problem. In the capitalist heaven, self-interest and violence are the only logical way of life, because of the ultimate perversion of the moral precepts set down for an individualist society. In the final cannibalistic tableau, as Victoria and her erstwhile antagonists join together for what is surely a parody of a conventional comic restoration of order, a picnic from the body of the only morally complete character, she remarks "There's only peace and happiness, law and order, consent and co-operation. My life's work has borne fruit. It's settled" (p.223). The sense of reconciliation is emphasised in the last scene, as Disraeli apologises to Florence for murdering her in a sexual frenzy (p.222) and even Arthur is verbally reprieved by Victoria and Private Griss, as they eat his leg (p.223).

The play's progress from the crisis in contemporary Britain, to National Government, in the near future, to anarchy and the apocalyptic mass murder at Beechy Head (at least arguably, in the light of Arthur's mad speech on the mass destruction of civilisation, pp.184-187, a representation of nuclear war), and finally to an attack upon the ethic which creates these situations is best illustrated by the trials, one of which takes place in each of the minimum three sections of the play. In each of these scenes, varying degrees of perfunctoriness in the attention of characters in authority to ritual and formality are indicative of particular states of social disintegration. In the first section, the contemporary/Victorian trial, held against the background of the abolition of capital punishment, Victoria uses the now defunct black cap irreverently, turning the ritualistic to

functional ends by using it to keep out the draught (p.147). There is an insistence upon hearing the accused's side of the story, even if Len's case is, in effect, predetermined and Len "swears", with a respect for convention characteristic of this court "to tell the truthwholetruthnothingbuttruth/LORD CHAMBERLAIN:Amen" (p.148). Albert, who is keen to see a formal defence for Len and Joyce (p.151), calls the bloodthirsty doctor as an expert witness, who in turn virtually convicts Len and Joyce, finally complaining that "Had I been given full academic freedom my evidence would have hanged them" (p.152). There is even a formal appeal against Victoria's inevitable guilty sentence, on the grounds that Len replaced the manhole cover after crushing his victim's head with it, but Victoria dismisses it, and announces:

VICTORIA: [...] The sentence of the court upon you is that you be taken from this place to a lawful prison and that you be ^{kept} there until you are dead, and that your bodies be afterwards handed over to the doctors, and your souls to our lady novelist royal (p.152)

In this scene there is an excessive attention to formality, which is closely observed in a case in which the court is clearly unjust, but the accused are, without question, guilty. In the second trial, conducted by Gladstone upon Len, there is an even greater attachment to form, and less impression of justice being done. In this case, the accused, although clearly a murdering rogue, is in fact on trial for a crime which his judge has committed. On this occasion the "culprit" is to be hung by his "progressive" father, in the name of a new government where regulations and formalities (which are compared to the laws of

cricket - p.174) are improvised with fervent attention from Gladstone as the trial progresses. In the final trial, the vision of society striven for by the authority figures of the play is realised, as a completely innocent man, sentenced to an absurd series of crimes (pp.197-198) is tried in a case referred to as "the usual formality" (p.199), before being sentenced to the progressively more barbaric death of being eaten alive, or, in point of fact, dead. The forms are all that is left, and the logic of a society which seeks to mythologise its capacity for progress, replacing old forms with new, still more irrelevant rituals, is taken to its syllogistic end. To this end, Bond specifies that the remaining scenery should be removed (p.138), so that the formality of the final section and its absurdity, is emphasised by the lack of any trappings of ritual. The same joke is expressed much more directly in Mrs. Wilson's Diary, when, at the height of the Seamen's strike, Mrs. Wilson catches Harold "thoughtfully sticking some of my old hatpins into a little model of Mr. Hogarth [leader of the NUS] made out of Giles' moulditoy plasticine set and murmuring strange words from an old book concealed inside a dustjacket called "Modernising Britain" (p.66). It is only when Early Morning, a notoriously "difficult" play, is viewed as an explanation of current political ethics and possible future models for Britain, that much of its narrative structure becomes clear. The play also provides an example of the extremely common theme amongst black comedies of its time, of the ambiguous relationship between the modern meritocracy and outmoded forms.

In the single important, but relatively incidental theme which I have chosen to examine in Early Morning, one can see a great many of the characteristic obsessions of black comedy in

our period. Bond poses the question, particularly through the figure of Gladstone, of whether, given a meritocracy, Britain would be any more free from autocratic institutions than it had been previously. Indeed, there is an implication that it would be less so, in the forebodings of dictatorship which attached to the new, obsessively modern world created by the leaders of this new Britain. The Labour movement is seen to be contributing to a dictatorship in this play, and in this way Early Morning anticipates the views of many of the commentators of black comedy about the rise of the New Right in the last two years before the election of Heath.

FOOTNOTES

1. J. Elsom, Post-War British Theatre, (London, 1976), p.182.
2. Ibid. p.184.
3. K. Itzin, Stages In The Revolution: Political Theatre in Britain Since 1968, (London, 1980) pp.12-15.
4. Ibid. pp.39-50.
5. P. Ansorge, Disrupting the Spectacle: Five Years of Experimental and Fringe Theatre in Britain, (London, 1975), p.57.
6. Potter, op.cit. p.18.
7. D.E. Butler and A. King, op.cit. p.37.
- 7a Stultifying, at least, for grass roots party activists, - see, for example, R.H.S. Crossman, The Backbench Diaries of Richard Crossman, (London, 1981)
8. "Appeal to Man of Youthful Aspiration: The Future Belongs to Us", The Times,¹³ October , 1964.
9. A. Greenwood, "The Chairman of The Labour Party", Tribune, 2 Oct. ., 1964.
10. H. Fairlie, "Labour and the Will to Govern", The Spectator,²⁷ Sep. , 1963.
11. Lord Bowden, "Labour's Way", New Society, 1 Oct. , 1964.
12. D. Watt, "The New World of Mr. Wilson", The Spectator, 4 Oct. , 1963.
13. P. Ableman, Green Julia, (London, 1966)
14. It may perhaps be significant that Wilson's similar background also led him to a degree in economics.
15. R. Ingrams and J. Wells, Mrs. Wilson's 2nd Diary (London, 1967) I have used this particular period of the infamous Private Eye satire, since it is the closest historical fit to the period from which the original West End production would have drawn its script. The review/play had originally been planned for 1967, but as I will explain in due course, the production was postponed until 1968. The first production seemed to have addressed the year following the 1966 election, roughly that of the above document. One cannot say which events were portrayed in the original production, but my quotations will certainly follow the "spirit" of the piece, whose script was never published.
16. D. Halliwell, Little Malcolm and His Struggle Against The Eunuchs, (London, 1967)
17. "In Praise of Strikes", The Spectator, 23 May, 1969.
18. J. Antrobus, Trixie and Baba (London, 1969)
19. King, op.cit. p.114.

20. D. Pinner, Fanghorn, (Harmondsworth, 1966)
21. King, op.cit. p.53 (for example).
22. G. Hutchinson, Edward Heath: A Personal and Political Biography, (London, 1970), pp.176-77.
23. A. Maud, "Winter of Tory Discontent", The Spectator, ¹⁴Jan. , 1966.
24. "Labour and Unemployment", New Society, 28 Sep. 1967.
25. H. Fairlie, op.cit.
26. A Labour Party Candidate, "The Road to Wedgewoodbenistan", The Spectator, 3 Aug. , 1974.
27. D. Cregan, Miniatures, London, 1970.
28. G. & B. Lloyd Evans, Plays in Review 1956-1980: British Drama and The Critics, (London, 1985), pp.141-42.
29. Lord Hill, Behind The Screen: The Broadcasting Memoirs of Lord Hill, (London, 1975), pp.99-100.
30. "The Expendability of Harold", The Spectator, 9 May, 1969.
31. Spectator, op.cit. 9 May.
32. "Votes, Votes, Votes", New Society, 14 Sep. 1967.
33. A. Watkins, "How Tough Is Ted?", New Statesman, 20 Oct. 1967.
34. J. Orton, Up Against It (London, 1979)
35. Although Orton would have based his attacks on earlier occurrences than the Du Cann affair, since the play was completed by this time.
36. R.H.S. Crossman, Diaries of a Cabinet Minister, Vol II (London, 1976), pp.159-160.
37. King, op.cit. p.298.
38. By 1970, with the collapse of In Place of Strife, heralding a fall in the stocks of the pro-Wilson Barbara Castle, and a deliberate "fading out" of Richard Crossman, the three most important members of cabinet after Wilson were surely Healey, Jenkins and Callaghan (Crossman, op.cit. Vol.III, p.947), none of whom had shown themselves sympathetic to the Prime Minister.
39. A. Waugh, "Bend Over All of You", The Spectator, 2 May, 1969.
40. A. King, "Britain's Ministerial Turnover", New Society, 18 Aug. 1966.
41. M. Stewart, Life and Labour: An Autobiography (London, 1980), p.205.
42. "Now what the old man's niece wanted in Belcher's Luck was really to possess this crumbling, decaying old England, and do a white-hot

technology bit on it "Interview, "David Mercer", S. Trussler (ed), New Theatre Voices of the Seventies, London, 1981, pp.46-57.

43. Introduction, p.9.
44. I. Wardle, The Theatres of George Devine, London, 1978, p.269.
45. The marriage of political convenience is an almost ubiquitous metaphor in Cregan's plays. In Miniatures, there is the proposed marriage of Raymond to Joyce Pinnington (REG: She's in love with the headmaster/RAYMOND: What?/REG: You must win her over to yourself so that he sees his staunchest ally disappear" - p.63) and in The Houses by The Green all the characters wish to marry Susan, in order to attain her promised fortune and the upper hand on Molyneaux. Also, in Bond's Early Morning, the marriage of George to Florence is in fact proposed to placate the people's revolutionary fervour (p.139), whilst in Belcher's Luck and The Ruling Class, to name but two, political marriages also figure prominently.
- 45a Marcus declared of this new generation of black comic dramatists: "I think we are all rather ^{sort of} similar people. I expect most of us voted Labour last year [1964] (I should guess our favorite politician ^{have been} Nye Bevan)". Having identified himself with the party's disappointed left, he goes on to explicitly link the change in the nature of comedy with the political background of the sixties - pointing out the loss of the possibility of a "happy end": "What is there to put in its stead? In the Macmillan era a win on the ~~Premium Bonds~~ perhaps? Under Douglas-Home (the anarchist's favorite Prime Minister - a perfect example of non-government!) the sight on the horizon of a flock of grouse! And under Harold Wilson? "Let us raise our ~~tumblers~~ of Sanatogan: the balance of payments crisis is OVER!" ~~slow curtain~~." Interview: J.F. McCrindle, Behind The Scenes: Theater and Film Interviews from the Transatlantic Review, London, 1971, pp.150-152.
46. "Portrait of The Week", The Spectator, ²¹ Jan. , 1966.
47. M. Coady, "The Premier and the Party", New Statesman, 5 May, 1967.
48. A. Watkins, "An Early Warning to George", The Spectator, 14 Jan. 1966.
49. "LBJ's New Poodle", New Statesman, ⁶ Jan. , 1967.
50. G. Brown, In My Way (London, 1970), p.146.
51. D. Childs, Britain Since 1945 (London, 1979), p.188.
52. A. Sked and C. Cook, Post-War Britain: A Political History, (Harmondsworth, 1979), p. 269.
53. Childs, op.cit. p.171.
54. Elsom, op.cit. p.184.
55. J. Campbell, Roy Jenkins: A Biography (London, 1983), p.92.
56. Even the celebrated and extremely biting attack upon Henry Brooke as Home Secretary which was presented as an episode of This Is Your Life, concentrated more upon his personal weakness and incompetent decision-

making than his actual political hypocrisy, although this sketch comes closer to the spirit of Mrs. Wilson's Diary than most. It is reproduced in N. Sherrin and D. Frost (op.cit.) - pp.113-114.

57. There are exceptions, as when Harold earnestly hopes that the inept Arthur Bottomley will meet with an appalling end in Rhodesia (p.35).
58. S. Eveling, Come and Be Killed & Dear Janet Rosenberg, Dear Mr. Kooning (London, 1971)
59. G. Lloyd Evans, op.cit. pp.207-210.
60. C. Harrison, L. Melfi, R. Howard, New Short Plays (London, 1968), pp.6-30.
61. D. Hare, Slag (London, 1971)
62. L. Anderson, "If", Films and Filmstars: Extracts from the Movie, (London, 1984), pp.1276-77.
63. My quotations are taken directly from the film, which I had videotaped in its recent screening.
64. In Sampson's Anatomy of Britain Today of 1965, published only a year after Wilson came to power, it is pointed out that whilst the "technocracy" of science was a little better off, there was still much dissatisfaction on even this very basic premise of Wilsonism. A. Sampson, Anatomy of Britain Today (London, 1965) pp.367-390.
65. A. Bennett, Forty Years On and other plays (London, 1985)
66. Quoted in G. & B. Lloyd Evans, op.cit. p.160.
67. Ibid. p.159.
68. Ibid. pp.158-160.
69. M. Hay and P. Roberts, Bond: A Study of His Plays (London, 1980), p.67.
70. Ibid. p.80.
71. Stewart, op.cit. p.203.
72. H. Wilson, The Labour Government, 1964-1970 (London, 1971) p.494.
73. King, op.cit. p.192.
74. H. Fairlie, "The Life of Politics", Encounter, January, 1967.
75. D. Hirst, Edward Bond, (London, 1985), p.101
76. Hay and Roberts, op.cit. p.67.
77. K. Worth, op.cit. p.173.
78. Hirst, op.cit. p.108.
79. E. Bond, Plays: One (London, 1977), p.139.

80. T. Coult, The Plays of Edward Bond (London, 1977), p.65.
81. Lord Bowden, op.cit.
82. "No Sex Without Responsibility is Lord Longford's Slogan", The Times,
1 May , 1964.
83. G. Marshall, "After Denning", New Society, 3 Oct. 1963.
84. Lord Hailsham, op.cit. pp.203-204.
85. Hirst, op.cit. pp.96-97.
86. M. Laing, Edward Heath: Prime Minister (London, 1972), pp.113-114, 190-191.
87. "Hanging: Top Judges to Vote", Sunday Mirror¹⁴, Dec. , 1969.
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88. H. Wilson, op.cit. p.734.

CHAPTER THREE

POWELL, HEATH AND THE RISE OF THE NEW RIGHT

1968 - 1974

"Well Sir, it is like this", replied the man known as Teddy, "all of the patterers have our own special pitch. My own particular pitch is toughness. Now the other fellow - you know who I mean (and here he gestured vaguely with his arm) - he was a dab hand at the old technology trick. It worked well enough while it lasted - and make no mistake, good luck to him, say I. We all have our livings to make. I tried my hand at the same sort of thing in my time, but for me it didn't work so well. Then a few of my pals and me got together down Albany way and thought up a new pitch. We'd say life was going to be hard, dreadful hard. We reckoned the old public had had enough of silver linings and pie in the sky, and we'd try out something different for a change. Did I believe it? Why bless you Sir, that thought never once crossed my mind".

Alan Watkins, "Mayhew's Westminster", New Statesman, 12 March, 1971.

A few months after her appointment as leader of the Conservative Party in February 1975, the first biography of Margaret Thatcher was produced by a fellow right-wing Conservative MP, Ernle Money.¹ Whilst that account of her political life did not attempt to conceal her far right philosophy, it has one overriding, continually repeated theme which contrasts sharply with said philosophy, that of Margaret Thatcher as a moderate. Of the state of the British electorate, Money remarks that "there has been a large area of the middle ground that has found itself increasingly unhappy with the policies of each of the parties"² and observes that Mrs. Thatcher is liable to appeal to this grouping because "she is essentially a moderate".³ "She has", claims the appropriately named writer, "always favoured a quietly reasoned rather than a didactic or abrasive manner of argument".⁴ This, Money believes, gives her the edge over her main rivals on the Tory right. "Powell", he explains for example, "despite all his gifts as an intellectual and a speaker, has allowed himself to become totally divorced from the centre ground in a way which Margaret Thatcher, who has a natural tendency towards moderation, never could",⁵ whilst "it was not thought that she would allow herself to be caught in a doctrinaire stance, as Sir Keith Joseph had done".⁶ Such claims are on almost every page of the book, which makes it a good deal of fun in 1991, but the element of apologia, of protesting too much, is a clue to the fact that, in 1975 also, the public perceived Mrs. Thatcher as the dogmatic extremist that she in fact proved to be. Thatcher became leader thirty-five days after the end of our period, and the desperate desire on the part of her supporters to portray her as a moderate can be traced to a particular phase of Tory

Party history, which began in the latter sixties.

I do not believe that particular historical trends can be traced to a single date, any more than can dramatic trends to a particular performance, but having said this, a speech made on April 20th 1968, in Birmingham by John Enoch Powell⁷, a member of the shadow cabinet, provided the impetus for a revival of the hard right, by demonstrating the potential popular support for a unified set of policies on race in particular, and a number of other romantic Tory ideals behind which a substantial number of disaffected Tories could gather. Powell spoke, with his usual eloquence, on the subject of black and Asian immigration, citing local alarm at numbers introduced and calling for tighter controls and a voluntary repatriation policy, but it was not what was said which caused such alarm (it had been publically stated, as we have seen, before) but the words used to express this idea. Powell spoke of a disaster of unqualified proportions, comparing liberal toleration of mass immigration to the appeasement policies of the 1930s⁸, of a nation gone mad to allow such things⁹, of his constituents who had complained to him of the disruption of their lives, and of a little old lady (what else?) who was the last remaining white woman in her street, which had been "formerly a respectable street in Wolverhampton"¹⁰, who was victimised by her neighbours by having excreta put through her letterbox as well as children following her down the street chanting "racialist, racist", amongst other things.¹¹ "As I look ahead I am filled with foreboding. Like the Roman, I see the river Tiber foaming with much blood", was Powell's ultimate prophesy. The next day Heath sacked Powell from his shadow cabinet, but the newspaper and television coverage which Powell had been careful to arrange

before giving his speech created a massive public reaction.¹² An ugly demonstration, which involved a march upon parliament by dockers and porters from Smithfield market was staged three days after the speech, whilst Powell received 100,000 letters within a week of his speech, the overwhelming majority of which were in favour of his views.¹³

A moment of real danger arrived for parliament, as Powell, Crossman commented, was:

appealing to mass opinion right over parliament and his party leadership. The movement he is arousing has no respect for Parliament and for our institutions and it detests the bloody things that so-called educated people in the Establishment are doing to ordinary, decent mortals .¹⁴

Powell's motives, Crossman considered, were to undermine Hogg, who had joined the liberal Tory, Sir Edward Boyle, in sponsoring the idea of a bipartisan approach to the Race Relations Bill, drawn up in response to the Kenyan Asian crisis:

I suspect he made the Birmingham speech with the calculation that if Heath didn't want the resignation of Boyle and Hogg he would have to sack him and so split the party. I should guess he miscalculated the extent of the popular appeal and has been slightly appalled by it. He isn't a fascist but a fanatic, a bizarre conservative extremist with violent views on this subject.¹⁵

New Society interpreted his speech as an attempt at mass appeal on a broad range of radical right wing policies, contrasting the amusement and general derision which had greeted earlier right wingers such as Duncan Sandys, with Powell's appeal to "the

tribal mind".¹⁶ A form of Tory populism, of appeal to the "conservative working man" of Powell's vision suddenly emerged as a vote-winner, manifesting itself in the strikes and demonstrations which followed his speech. Subsequent commentators have identified Powell as the forerunner of the more familiar new right, catalysing a latent support of the reactionary "silent majority" in the sixties and seventies for a resurgence of the hard right.¹⁷ Pressure mounted upon Heath, who was forced into a number of changes to his shadow cabinet in favour of the right, with Boyle, particularly, a target for the "hawks". By the time of the 1970 General Election, Heath would have called the Selsdon Park conference, which announced a succession of hard line policy initiatives which, with emphasis on such issues as monetary restraint, law and order, and immigration, caused considerable alarm in the liberal press.¹⁸ By the end of 1970, Heath was said to be "leading the most right-wing Tory Government since pre-war days"¹⁹, thereby allaying the attacks of his right-wing critics.

But it was Powell himself who claimed to have swung the electorate in the Tories' favour²⁰ with some support from election psephologists, although it was added in one study that although Powell undoubtedly mobilised some working class voters who would not normally vote Conservative, he had also mobilised a Labour backlash among black voters.²¹ Although Powell isolated himself from fellow Conservative MPs with frequent attacks on the leader and his policies, as well as attacks on such bodies as the Home Office, which he accused of deliberately lying over immigration figures, his grass roots populism, also manifested in his opposition to the EEC, with party and public, amounted to a force to be reckoned with throughout the Heath

premiership. In 1970, shortly before the election, the question was raised as to who in effect led the Conservative Party, since Powell's influence clearly dictated policy, as well as being popular enough to threaten Heath's leadership.²² As late as July 1973, Powell was still considered to be the greatest asset to his party (more so than Heath) in a national opinion poll.²³ There were persistent calls from the liberal weeklies for the major parties to unite in an attack against Powellism in the seventies, but few major controversies were raised by the parties against Powell, perhaps for fear of occasioning another major confrontation with right-wing populism.²⁴

Meanwhile, other forces on the right began to gather, or at least to be identified for the first time as having gathered, behind the banner of the New Right. Part of this process involved an identification of the Tory left, which stood against Powell's influence on Tory immigration policy, and was identified by a general liberal voting pattern in the House.²⁵ The right had come to be particularly identified with ideology, (a concept which the traditionally pragmatic Conservatives had avoided in the past) its proponents being largely economic Powellites, who were notably younger and more "meritocratic" in background than the rest of the party.²⁶ Rationality, competition and self interest were key words in the brand of Toryism preached by this group²⁷ and its success, as it were, in influencing the party was highlighted by the economic difficulties of the country in the early seventies. The level of unemployment reached one million 19 months into Heath's premiership²⁸, leading the Conservatives to be lambasted even by traditionally sympathetic newspapers. Even The Express saw fit to attack Heath's economic policies in a series of articles

which pointed to the poverty of many individuals in Britain.²⁹ The Daily Mirror, never, of course, sympathetic to the Tories, dwelled upon James Prior's assertion that he did not believe that there were families who lived on sausages as meat, an insensitive remark in its context.³⁰ Paradoxically, there was some support for the new "alternative" right, particularly the campaigning, entrepreneurial, privatising schemes of Sir Keith Joseph.³¹ As Heath's premiership wore on, his confrontations with the Unions earned him the title of a right wing dogmatist, yet this was not enough for the New Right, whose criticism of Heath's leadership, even from the front bench through Joseph, Thatcher and Geoffrey Rippon (the latter a member of the notorious Monday Club)³², became increasingly strident. It would be possible to allude to many of these, but one particularly amusing example is Mrs. Thatcher's attack on the second phase of Heath's incomes policy which, she felt, left poverty-stricken students with inadequate grants.³³ After the election defeat of February 1974, the only perfunctorily veiled threats of the right became open hostility, as the Conservatives began to have two policies for any one issue, those of Mrs. Thatcher, and those of Heath's shadow cabinet.³⁴ Attempts to portray Heath as a liberal Tory, such as that by Laing, who quotes Heath remarking that "I don't think anyone can show that the right wing had very much influence on our policies"³⁵, are belied by such schemes as the Government's removal of free school milk and the introduction of museum charges, both carried out by Mrs. Thatcher. She argued persuasively in their favour at the time, but later gave the characteristic minister's defence to Money, of not really believing in these policies, but being beholden to the concept of joint responsibility. Money

believed this, since he felt that "bearing in mind the interests of children, rather than doctrinaire principles" was in her nature.³⁶ Even Heath's proclaimed liberality on the concept of capital punishment began to be something from which he increasingly distanced himself, after cries of "shame" over the issue from a Conservative Ladies Association which he addressed in Glasgow.³⁷

Whatever Heath's claims of liberalism, there can be little doubt that the dramatists of the period after the "rivers of blood" speech saw the Tories as distinctly threatening. It is worth quoting Hare's essay on Knuckle of 1983 at some length, in order to elucidate views which would appear to have been quite representative of our writers' attitudes to the New Right:

Underlying Knuckle is the feeling that there will no longer be any need for public life to be decked out in morality. In the last days of the Empire, English capitalism still dressed in a bespoke philosophy of service and intended civilisation. But now politicians were ready to stand on a platform of bad-tempered self-interest, with only the most formal claims on the electorate's higher feelings. Out for Number One was suddenly to be the acceptable political creed of the day. In this, Knuckle, God help us, foreshadows the arrival of Mrs. Thatcher, who likes to be thought of as a revolutionary, but whose true line of succession is from her hated opponent Edward Heath. The press loves to call her a crusader, but the title is decorative only, mere camp. A crusade for yourself is no crusade at all.³⁸

The degeneration of "standards" in British public life is a central point from which the New Right itself took political succour, and this degeneration was associated more with Wilson's premiership than any other. It is fitting then, that the last year of his first spell as Prime Minister, which witnessed the nadir of this Government's political fortunes in the spring and summer of 1969, should see two plays which showed an explicit connection between the Wilson government's failure to lead the nation by anything except a series of shoddy short-term manoeuvres and the coming to prominence of a political grouping which promised a new and very radical vision. What is notable about Saunders' The Borage Pigeon Affair³⁹, produced in mid-summer 1969 and Exton's Have You Any Dirty Washing, Mother Dear?⁴⁰ of the spring of the same year, is their abandonment of allegory in favour of a simple, direct rendering of the running of the affairs of state. In each case, the portrayal is in microcosm, but these are not state of the nation plays, as are the allegories involving public schools or remote villages touched by modern forces discussed earlier. Saunders and Exton are not so much interested in providing a picture of a nation in change with oblique references to the rulers responsible for these changes and ingenious perspectives of the forces involved. Instead, they are concerned with the actual governors of the country and their lack of contact with those who are governed.

Have You Any Dirty Washing, Mother Dear? amounts to a portrayal of a group of MPs, Conservative and Labour, who appear to be representative of the familiar types of MPs available to public examination in 1969. The situation is an important foreign affairs committee which must sit for the reading of a

Bill which will decide the role of a former British colony in Africa, which is about to be overrun by a White African former colony. The potential for confrontation is clear enough, and the black/white division of the bill turns race into an issue which will create some surprising combinations. The committee has, of course, an inbuilt Labour majority, and is chaired by MP George O'Neill, who, it is remarked, wormed his way into the Prime Minister's affections, only to be found unfit for a major ministerial post, but as a close associate and fixer for the PM, is given minor responsibilities such as the chairmanship of the committee portrayed (p.116). It is a thumbnail sketch of character, as are all of the participants, yet it is certainly suggestive of George Wigg, sometime Postmaster General and central figure in Wilson's "kitchen cabinet". There are other familiar figures, such as the female MPs Miranda Muir and Ann Swink (Conservative and Labour, respectively), meritocrat figures of precisely the kind we deal with in greater detail below, the former of whom may suggest Mrs. Thatcher, since she is the most bitingly sarcastic of those present, as well as being clearly further to the right than her honourable friend, Norman Haggard, a progressive Tory, who is in fact an old Etonian in, quite literally, meritocrat's clothing (p.145). There is also the right-wing industrialist and entrepreneur, Henry Chandler, who is described as "military looking" and has made his considerable wealth in arms deals with the nation's foes (p.136). His chief antagonist is Arthur Bentwood, a working class Labour MP, who is constantly mocked for his ignorance by Henry. There is also Michael Beamish, a Labour intellectual of liberal opinions, who is portrayed as out of touch with reality and the electorate.

We are presented, then, with a disparate but roughly representative group of MPs, who discuss political issues in a familiar manner. The chairman, like parliament itself, particularly in 1969, with the collapse of In Place of Strife and the defeat of the Lords' reforms, is unable to control the group of MPs assembled, as they argue bitterly, not only about familiar party arguments (thinly disguised references to Suez are brought up in answer to Henry's cries in favour of the old Empire and the building of Britain's military capacity abroad - pp.178-79) but also divisions within the parties themselves, a notable characteristic of the period which saw the beginning of the decline of consensus politics. Miranda Muir calls for a stronger government, remarking:

"One is forced to wonder if this lack of control is a deliberate strategy.

NORMAN: Tactic.

MIRANDA: What?

NORMAN: Tactic. This Government is incapable of strategy". (p.134)

As the Wilson Government blundered from one short-term expediency to the next, the most salient characteristic of its ministers was their new-found wealth. O'Neill's country estate backs onto that of Henry, and Chandler spends most of his time avoiding his nouveau-riche neighbour (p.116), this recalling the pillorying by the press of such wealthy Labour notables as Harold Leaver and Crossman, whose diaries, especially in the later years, often retreat to defensiveness about his country estate, Prescote.

But the main joke of the play is a simple one, incessantly repeated. The supposedly modern and technocratic MPs from both

sides of the House are hidebound by a series of bizarre and archaic rituals, and trivial rules, which prevent action on an important issue. The first of the play's two acts is taken up entirely by Arthur's failure to observe the ritual of rising to his feet at the mention of the House of Commons, as he thinks it is a silly and pointless ritual. There are endless jokes about procedural improprieties, such as Henry's attempt to move an amendment uncovered (that is, without a piece of cloth on his head) - he is prevented from making his amendment entirely because of this lapse (pp.123-31). There are some examinations of how such ossified traditions have come to emerge, as for example when Arthur points out that the reason for members having to rise at the mention of the House was to prove that MPs were not inebriated (p.127). Hyperbole comes into play, as the gestures which are executed at the mention of various parliamentary institutions become increasingly absurd:

At the words "along there", Norman executes a strange gesture. He places his left hand on top of his head and stretches out his right arm horizontally in a pointing gesture. (p.146)

But there is a seeming restoration of good sense, if not order, when Arthur agrees to a quittance of his previous impropriety by bobbing up and down seventeen times in order to catch up on his failure to do so throughout most of the first act, provided the other MPs do not watch him do so. They cluster at the window, their backs ostentatiously turned, as Arthur's bobs are counted by the chairman (pp.149-150). At this tableau, the curtain falls.

Our hopes of mutual progress on the bill, however, are dashed at the opening of the second act, where we find that Henry

has been accused by Arthur of sniggering during the latter's quittance, and no further progress has been made in the intervening fifteen hours. It is now very late at night, and the parliamentary stenographer, the only member of the great British public present among this assembly of the great and good, leaves in frustration, advising the MPs to do the same (p.159). They do not even notice her leaving and their squabbles become increasingly childish. Michael removes his trousers and moons the other MPs (p.168), whilst Arthur blows "a resounding raspberry" (p.179) at O'Neill, who suspends him in response, and proceeds to suspend all of the other MPs one by one for various acts of puerility. Finally O'Neill loses his own cool, and has a bar-room brawl with Arthur, a member of his own party (pp.181-84). The chairman, unable to rule members from either side of the house, is bundled off and locked in the dunny, and the six remaining MPs begin singing old wartime songs together and drinking whisky, with nothing achieved on the bill as the sun rises. When the Proctor arrives, and knocks upon the committee room door with due formality, they lock themselves in and continue singing as the curtain falls (pp.186-191).

The evocation of the spirit of the blitz at a crisis point, combined with complete inaction, aside from passionate speeches, the hallmark of the Wilson administration, are seen here as universal to the ineffective parliament of 1969. In the year in which backbenchers combined to defeat the two major attempts at reform of the latter part of Wilson's 1966 administration, MPs are seen as a group of self-indulgent and uncontrollable children. The fact that the play is not a million miles from the real world is seen by Exton's claim to have based the play, (though surely not the finale) upon an

actual report of a parliamentary committee in The Times.⁴¹

The setting of the play in a single room, whose only decoration is a Victorian portrait and a commercial calendar (p.113), symbolising the two directions in which this ineffective group are being pulled, provides a sense of claustrophobia which is gently increased until the final image, the locking of the committee room door, showing its complete and deliberate isolation from the world outside, eloquently pictures the relationship of Parliament to the people. Parliament, for both sides, is a cosy consensus, a club of like interests which excludes ordinary people from its decisions, or lack of them. It is seen as a body beyond the power of those who ostensibly control it, when, at the most seriously questioning point of the play, Arthur speaks of the lack of interest of both himself and the people of the constituency he represents, in the plight of "these blackies", of whom he knows very little. This confession leads to an even more significant questioning of the role of Parliament:

HENRY: You might as well say we shouldn't make decisions for someone who lives in Glasgow or Liverpool or Shepton Mallet - simply because we don't live there!

ARTHUR: Well, I don't know - perhaps we shouldn't .

(p. 172)

Arthur goes on to question the importance of a body which fails to represent, and indeed largely acts against the wishes of the people, who are too often damaged by its decisions. He speaks of giving up:

ANN: We can't just do that, Arthur. It's all too big and important now. We can't just step off -

that would be disaster for everyone.

ARTHUR: I think you're kidding yourselves. I don't think anyone would notice - except for the better.

NORMAN: No, Mrs. Swink is right. In a way you're both right. The juggernaut is now in motion. We can only cling on^{try to steer it} and hope to avoid crushing too many of the peasants.

ARTHUR: Oh - peasants now, is it? (p.173)

Significantly, as the Labour and single liberal Tory MPs take up the theme of their own helplessness, it is Henry, of the hard right, with Miranda's support, who takes the only political initiative:

Arthur wants to know what we know about Zingawa that gives us the right to take decisions that will affect their whole life. All right. Fair enough. I'll tell him. Your average Zingawan is an idle, ignorant, bloodthirsty savage...

ANN: I protest!

HENRY...only just down from the trees for the most part...

MICHAEL: Mr. Chairman!

HENRY: He wants to know. I'm telling him. Let's be honest for God's sake . (pp.173-74)

This foreshadows the capacity of the New Right to present a vision of Britain which consensus politicians could not. Miranda's view of the possibility of British troops being used to defend the African country ("Our troops would ^{never} side with black against white anyway" - p.141) is one which seems to have caught the popular ear in that the only working class MP, Arthur, sides with the racists (p.123). In the end, though,

much of the serious questioning of the role of Parliament and of right wing populism inciting working class racism is buried beneath Exton's repeated desire to put across the simple joke about an outmoded institution staffed by incompetent children. The most significant factors are frequently lost sight of by the dramatist's use of revue sketch techniques which give the play a sense of an overlong joke, but there are moments in Have You Any Dirty Washing, Mother Dear? which bring together the central themes of both the satirising of the Wilson administration and the rise of the New Right.

Saunders' The Borage Pigeon Affair also eschews allegory in its political address. Easily Saunders' most overtly political play, it looks at the British Governmental crisis in microcosm through the "small provincial town" (p.217) of Borage, where the Labour Party are in power, but are certain to lose the next election as "a foregone conclusion" according to Tessa, the wife of the Labour council leader, Makepeace Garnish (p.221). This was the attitude of the British press to the Labour Government of 1969, and although Labour made surprising opinion poll gains over the following year, this prediction proved well founded. The surname Garnish is indicative of the kind of liberalism which the labour leader represents, being merely decorative, whilst his christian name is equally overtly symbolic, and is continually verified by his pronouncements: "I believe the students have a case", remarks the old political juggler, "And their professors. I take the balanced view" (p.247). He confesses, after the great crisis of the play overtakes him, to have spent his life "papering over the cracks" (p.294). Garnish has been, it would seem, just the kind of liberal who has been damaging his party's reputation over the

Wilson period. He is wealthy, seeing no paradox in having a maid in his home, to whom both he and his family are extremely rude (pp.224-26) and the poor come less into calculation than the family's calculation of their own wealth over that of the family of Dinsdale Badger, the local Conservative leader:

TESSA: What are you doing with those sausages?

HELEN [Makepeace's daughter]: For the poor.

TESSA: They'll sell them, of course, to buy gin.

Chop them up for firewood, keep them in the bath.

They don't come off tax, you know. (p.228)

This opening scene at the breakfast table of the Garnish family introduces the central theme of the play, immigration and the familiar problem of the inactivity of the Labour Party on crucial issues:

TESSA: Well, what did it [the council] do about the aircraft noises, what did it do about the immigrants?

GARNISH: We have working parties on both these topics.

TESSA: And the aircraft noises are getting louder and the immigrants are getting blacker.

GARNISH: One has to take the broad view. The correct approach is the humanitarian one. .
Forbearance, understanding.

TESSA: You know you can't stand blacks.

GARNISH: That's not the point. (pp.225-26)

Garnish is as racist as his New Right opponent, and like his political superior is good at making speeches at council about race. But unlike Wilson, Makepeace's motives are not inscrutable, any more than his real feelings:

The Labour members of the council have managed in the teeth of Tory inertia to push through progressive plans for a massive slum clearance as soon as funds are available and we can get rid - see our way to re-housing the nig - the inhabitants. (p.236)

The element of racism within the Labour Party⁴², so much to the fore in Exton's and Saunders' plays, is reflected by the Labour movement's uncomfortable attempts to incorporate the feelings of working class racists and is epitomised by Enoch Powell's citation of a Labour minister (the later notorious John Stonehouse) in support of his own views during the "rivers of blood" speech.⁴³

The play also takes up the idea of the pointlessness of democracy itself. Like Parliament, the Labour controlled council is an elaborate talking shop in which views are forcibly expressed, but no action is taken. As with Barnes' House of Lords, one of the members proves to be dead, but it takes some time for his colleagues to realise (pp.238-39). It is the ideal environment for the Wilsonian leader, who is exhilarated by its talkative inaction: "Our session having no end, it has no aftermath, no dreadful crunch when verbal activity must be translated into reports and actions, to be judged by common mortals" (p.239). The Labour members fight a visionless rearguard action against a New Right led by such notables as Badger, the obviously named Brigadier Bull^c-Shitte, and the equally emblematic nomenclature of Mr. Muniman, the businessman who cannot bear the council sessions going for any length of time, because he always has business elsewhere. Muniman also has no time for his constituents:

I can't just sit in surgery two hours a day

I have to tout for customers,

while the halt and lame queue up outside. I have
to feed their fat faces and be nice to the swine,
and I can't even get it off tax any more, bloody
Labour Government (p.241)

The initiative is very much seized by the Conservatives. Brigadier Bull[£]Shitte is able to bring in immigration, even to the issue of dog fouling, since he, like Simon Gray's Sir Hubert before him, does not seem to be able to tell a West Indian from a dog (p.243). The only mercy for immigrants is that the Tories are as inactive as Labour, although their speeches become increasingly violent in tone. Badger later makes a speech which attacks the immigrants and calls for the familiar law and order ticket for the sake of "that majority of decent, right-thinking and Christian citizens which I have the honour to represent", echoing a phrase in Powell's "rivers of blood" speech which would become a cliché of satire of the New Right.

But finally, the council fails to act upon anything but the issue, invented by the cynical journalist Franklin Sear, who is the lover of Helen, of the Pigeon Problem. This proves the undoing of Garnish, since through this sublimely irrelevant issue, Badger is able to effect the personal defeat of Garnish which he so covets. Pigeon-keeping is Garnish's one hobby, and his only tenuous connection with his working-class roots, but Badger is able to force Garnish into agreeing to their banishment from Borage by blackmailing him with his knowledge of his wife's affair with the Labour leader, to which he has been alerted by Sear, who sums himself up to the audience as "occupation journalist's hack. Political persuasion, none, religious persuasion, don't make me laugh" (p.231). This provides a scene of spectacular backdown, where, like Wilson

with In Place of Strife, in the period immediately preceding the play's production, Garnish makes a series of speeches about the one principle on which he stands firm, and is forced into an ignominious reversal of this position, to the point of actually supporting his chief antagonist (pp.273-76, and 283-87).

While this happens, a large documentary-making team from the television programme "Travesty" are making of the Pigeon Problem a major national issue, ignoring as usual the demands of the local population, who are singularly and obsessively concerned with immigration. The "Spectacle", television, radio, the press are part of a political agenda which distracts the populace from actual issues, making an irrelevancy of democracy itself. A local inhabitant stops the film crew and demands that they address "the blacks" as an issue, endorsing Enoch Powell and his racialism as a solution (pp.267-68). Similarly, Sear's boarding house landlady (whose beliefs bear a striking resemblance to those expressed by Powell's little old lady - who also managed a boarding house)⁴⁵ berates Helen with her own . Smethwick-inspired version of neighbourliness:

It's the same with the niggers. I'd fill my house with niggers if I had my way, poor things, after all they can't help it can they? Only you have to think of the neighbours. Neighbours don't like niggers . (p.230)

Another reference to Powell occurs within the camera crew itself, from the cameraman:

CAMERAMAN: Look sambos now! The wog invasion's started! Which way to the passport office, then?
(*This apropos the Kenya High Commissioner, who happens to be passing. PHYLLIS puts on a pained expression, hard to tell from the normal one*)

KHC: I beg your pardon, Sir?

What!
CAMERAMAN: ^ADon't get uppity with me, boy! Go back
to Israel!

PHYLLIS: He means Africa.

CAMERAMAN: Oomski! Imski! Scramski!

*[The KHC, taking him for an idiot, goes on his
way]*

You got to be firm.

PHYLLIS: We're all the same under the skin, you
know.

CAMERAMAN: You've had one with his skin off, have
you?

[He laughs disgustingly]

PHYLLIS: Ugh!

*[Her expression grows even more pained, whether at this
sally or the idea of a Negro with his skin off we shall
never know. Perhaps it is better so] (pp.253-54)*

All this is an allusion to the dockers' demonstration, where the Kenyan High Commissioner coincidentally arrived at parliament at the height of the demonstration and was regaled with racist jeers⁴⁶, as was Ian Mikardo, an MP whose East End constituency would have contained many of the protestors. He attempted to console the crowd with the same inadequate platitudes as Phyllis, the middle class intellectual of Saunders' play, and was denounced as a "Japanese Jew".⁴⁷

The clear non-functioning of the governing body brings the play to its final tableau, where the cast, now seen as props in a simple image, arrange themselves as if in the aftermath of great violence (pp.303-4), while Sear gives, quite literally, a

lecture on the failure of democracy:

It has been asked: If the facts of the democratic structure fail so obviously to accord with the theory, how and why does this structure continue in its present form? [...] Society itself, fashioned to follow this ideal, takes on more and more the character of the machine, working regardless of the individual, in spite of the individual and even against the long term interest of the individual. (p.301)

He goes on to allege that people cannot be believed to exercise true democracy, and instead:

The only nod they make in the vague direction of their democratic ideals, in the direction of their professed belief in the freedom and responsibility of Western man to participate in and decide the destiny of their society, is to mark, once every few years, a cross on a piece of paper, whereby, according to a simple mathematical formula, one or the other of two machines within the machine can pretend to run it; can sit at the dummy controls, push the dummy buttons, pull the dummy levers [...] democracy is a comfort-word, freedom is a comfort-word, responsibility, tolerance, love of man. Ideals are of the word; words are of the lip; the fact is the machine. (pp.302-3)

Saunders³ view of democracy is appropriately bleak in 1969, with those who lead being completely divorced from those who are led, and pursuing their own personal ambitions while the abandoned

population either carry on apathetically, or are tempted by the alarming, extra-parliamentary implications of those who appeal to their baser instincts. The revised and semi-fascist New Right has the initiative, while their opponents will not stir from their torpor.

A similar scene, in a less complex form, unfolds in Cregan's Arthur⁴⁸ (1969)⁴⁹, where the title character, motivated primarily by ungratified lust, creates an extra-parliamentary revolution. He is incited to rebellion by his liberal aunt, who burns down her own house as a gesture of revolution in lieu of Arthur's lack of left wing zeal (pp.76-79), but he goes down a different path of radicalism altogether. He appeals to mob instinct, and a "personality cult" (p.99) develops around him. He uses the police, fire brigade and boy scouts to unseat the mayor, a parody Wilsonian technocrat who is obsessed by modern computerised gimmicks (p.77) and attempts to corruptly acquire property for his own gain (pp. 82-84, p.103). The Mayor is chased from town by one of his computer operated fire engines gone wrong (p.102) and returns to hand in his resignation to Arthur, who takes over (p.104), and it is predicted by a bystander, after his acceptance speech: "He means that sooner or later/He will probably become a dictator"(p.106). The play is a simplified (because written for performance by teenagers) version of the earlier predictions of a threat to government by the hard right, which is induced by the very visionless pragmatism of government itself.

In all of these plays there is an underlying fear of absolutism which is, no doubt, activated by the events of Powell's ascent to prominence. The earliest example of this syndrome, which was almost unheard of before Powell's "rivers of

blood" speech, occurs in Johnny Speight's Simpsonian parable If There Weren't Any Blacks You'd Have to Invent Them (1968)⁵⁰; the basic point of which is contained within its title. Here, a veritable rogues gallery of black comic stock characters, including a vicious Judge, two amoral priests, one catholic, the other protestant, an army officer, and a lustful Doctor of liberal pretensions persecute, and finally execute, a young Jewish homosexual. One by one, the other characters agree to the demands of a mob ruler, who is both literally and metaphorically blind, and is led about by a sighted man who (with equal heavy-handedness) refuses to open his tightly closed eyes, and always faces away from the direction of their travels. It is eventually agreed by all concerned that the young man is black, despite the evidence of all but the leader's eyes that he is not, and that it would benefit everyone present, even the liberals, who "thrive on injustice" (p.47), if he were to die. These plays, all of which create a sense of imminent apocalypse, present the New Right as probable leaders towards impending disaster. Such a cataclysm is inherently bound up with the crisis in race relations. Elsewhere, at around the same time, however, other New Right values were discussed in terms of those who were led, rather than leaders. These tended to eschew race relations as a central issue and concentrate more upon the materialism of the followers of the new philosophy, rather than the populist ambitions of those who were followed.

Money had, of course, always been a primary motivation for self-interested action in black comedies. One only need examine

the inherent tension between the greed of the individual and his or her desire to clothe such greed in public virtue in the dramas of Orton, or the early work of Cregan or Gray, for example, to find a key to the revivification of farce in the early to mid sixties. But the rise of the New Right saw the creation of characters who were prepared to embrace money as a regulator of human behaviour and morality in a far more open manner than had previously been mooted. By the "rivers of blood" speech, Powell was able to draw attention to a complete political agenda, which had, at its core, his long held (he had resigned, along with the rest of the treasury team of Chancellor Peter Thorneycroft and Nigel Birch, from Macmillan's cabinet) belief in monetary restraint and the free market, having amongst his most quoted and ridiculed remarks, the striking aphorism: "Often, when I am kneeling down in church, I think to myself how much we should thank God, the Holy Ghost, for the gift of capitalism".⁵¹ From as early as February 1967, Powell had openly attacked interventionism in all its forms, but especially the Prices and Incomes board, in a manner quite divergent from Conservative policy.⁵² More than one such attack is put into the mouths of black comic characters after his rise to prominence.

In Honour and Offer (1969)⁵³, we are presented with a conflict within a single ideological framework by the characters of Henry Cash and Alfred Thring, which is catalysed by a third party, Alfred's wife Doris. Henry is a quite well-off "chap" who lodges, a little implausibly, at the home of Alfred and Doris, whose lower middle-class existence is sustained by Alfred's wheeling and dealing business of selling dresses on the road to other members of their class. Henry is an unreformed Powellite, seeing unrestricted trade as a kind of Biblical

morality. When Alfred seeks an unsecured loan for the continuance of his business from Henry, Henry pontificates that "Credit without security is as chaff before the wind" (p.20), adding that without it:

HENRY: Immorality would follow; dishonouring of promises and contractual agreements; money lent in good faith would be repaid in worthless currency; values would be a subject for debate, variables!

ALFRED: Ah. We don't want immortality breaking out.

(p.21)

There is a basic joke to this play, since the only way that Henry can be tempted to provide the much needed loan is to be drawn into immorality by his uneducated hosts, who hold out a possibility of a liaison with Doris, for whom Henry has an unconsumed^m_A lust. Alfred wants Doris to "get him amenable", adding that it is very important that he gets the loan and suggesting that "You might get carried away, thinking of me" (p.24). Alfred is quite open about his own infidelities, which he regards as a way of increasing sales (pp.14-15).

In the second of the two acts, Doris attempts to execute the plan, but meets with horror and incomprehension from Henry as she openly explains the bargain:

DORIS: Haven't you^{all}_A got a fiddle? [she is referring to the local beekeeping society, of which Henry is secretary]. Alfred says nobody'd ever bother if there wasn't something in it for them [...] No I mean they're all^{at it}_A trying to get one over each other and never do anything without they get the price of a pint out of it.

HENRY: (stares at her,^{and}_A then addresses us): I'm

surrounded by the dissolution of standards. (p.38)

Henry's tragedy is that he cannot comprehend his own political metaphysic when it is presented to him in practice, as is evinced by his ironic proclamation to Doris in the same scene, that "There's no shame in thinking well of money; if there was a clear price ^{ticket} on everything we'd all know where we were" (p.39). On the grounds of his later profession that "Trade is proper; it's based upon mutual honesty, value for value, bargains kept. Trade is life; investment and return" (p.58), Henry gives Doris one thousand pounds as "a gift", but forestalls the collection of his debt for the moment. Before Henry can collect, Doris gives her "present" to Alfred, who goes to the races, gambles it and comes back much the wealthier, returning the money to Henry before he can act upon his lust (pp.68-72).

Henry finishes up fuming at the immorality of Alfred, but helpless to act. Henry's description of Alfred early on, as "on the road flannelling pretty feather ~~witt~~ ed housewives...he boasts of it! and chasing bad payers and selling his debts to strong-arms" (p.13) still applies, yet Alfred is now rich and successful in his own terms of success, the possession of money:

Money is success, confidence, clears the complexion,
brightens the eye, puts a spring in your step.
It's evidence of achievement, it's creative, it
stretches into ~~the~~ future, it creates action,
purpose: straightens your back (p.51).

Essentially, the clash of values which occurs in Honour and Offer (the title no doubt an allusion to the old bawdy joke, in keeping with the play's tone) is entirely Tory and right wing,

but Henry's espousal of hierarchy, a quality which he admires in his bees, is affronted by the newly-risen, who have similarly commercial ethics. They are no respecters of hierarchy, and undermine his position. He tells Ernest, his assistant at the beekeeping society, that "~~We~~ neglect honey and pursue shallow self interest-at our peril" (p.34), but fails to see that he has been guilty of this precisely. His cultured High Toryism is ironically undermined by the Thrings, since it is they, not Henry, who, like the bees he so admires have "no legends, no myths, no history; they work, they build, they perpetuate themselves" (p.35). Henry constantly reads from the rulebook of beekeeping propriety, whilst abstract theoretical structures mean nothing to the bourgeois achiever, Alfred, who fiddles his way around his social betters by his own rather grubby manifestation of Henry's romantic Tory philosophy.

In Leonardo's Last Supper (1969)⁵⁴, Peter Barnes takes up where The Ruling Class left off, on the theme of the rise of the New Right. As in the play mentioned above, the Lascas, a family of exiled Florentines who have been deputed to bury the catatonic Leonardo Da Vinci, who has been misdiagnosed as dead, quite openly identify money as a form of morality and are happy enough to identify it with Christianity, as when old Lasca cries out in frustration at his son "in the name o' God and profit" (p.133). All of Lasca's frustration at being excluded from Florence is pent up in him, for even more money is to be made there. "I miss", he says wistfully, "the comforting sound o' men making money" (p.140). His exile, he explains to the newly risen Leonardo, was the result of state interventionism. The Lascas had made a fortune during the last outbreak of plague,

which saw the rise of a form of meritocracy:

'Twas a time o' fear and opportunity. An upright man could make his way without benefit of breeding and influence [...] 'Twas a time for the man o' business, for the only question asked was "how much does it profit me?" It was our time, Lasca time.

(p.141)

But the local guilds had acted against the Lasca's miracle cure for the plague of (inevitably for the scatologically obsessed Barnes) bottled farts and jars of turds, a profitable sideline for their normal line of, already booming, business:

I was forced to join the Apothecaries Guild, with their gut and garbage rules for honest trading. Sallow Pates! They couldn't see that honesty's one thing and trading's something else again. The moment I put Lasca's excremental goodness on the market, out came their rules and regulations [...] Then they sent this weazel-eyed inspector o' turds round sniffing and spying. Had me up in front o' a full Guild court accused o'overcharging and watering down my merchandise. I had nothing to hide. But they stopped their ears and found me guilty. 'Twas envy, black, cancerous envy, I was fined 5,000 florins and no time to pay. (pp.143-44)

"I pray daily, hourly for revenge like a good Christian" (p.144) adds Maria, Lasca's wife, meekly. So christian are the Lascas, that when Leonardo reveals that his state of death revealed nothing but blackness, they cannot believe this, and ascribe his secrecy to a desire to make a good profit by retelling his tale

for money (pp.145-46). The play finally becomes a black burlesque of a "family drama", as Alphonso, their wastrel son, reveals that he is worthy of his parents by coming up with the idea of killing Leonardo. As he closes in on Leonardo, he makes a point which is as valid a commentary on the rise of the lower middle classes under a New Right meritocracy as it is about the Renaissance:

We're needed. You're a luxury. We're the new
men you scholars prate on about. You put us at
the centre of the universe. Men o'trade, o'money,
we'll build a new heaven and a new earth by
helping ourselves (p.149).

To the comedies mentioned above could be added further, directly political examples such as The Little Mrs. Foster Show, where the upper-class lady of the title has a similar ideological encounter with right wing entrepreneurs as does Henry in Honour and Offer, and How Brophy Made Good (1969)⁵⁵, David Hare's account of a lower middle-class right-winger who rises to real power outside of parliament, by honing in on the mass media, two examples which quickly come to mind amongst many. There are also plays which do not enter politics in the established sense, but discuss the infusion of New Right thinking, of a bourgeois achievement ethic, into the private universe of the underprivileged. In Halliwell's K D Dufford Hears K D Dufford ask K D Dufford how K D Dufford'll make K D Dufford (1969)⁵⁶, it is notable that the child murderer of the title is propelled by a perverted form of right-wing success ethic. He wants money and fame (p.32), and the best way of achieving this, it seems to Dufford, is by murdering a child. Dufford is loaded with right-wing mythology (for example,

homophobia - p.25) and considers personal wealth, to the exclusion of all moral questions to be a justified end, even considering the assassination of the President of the U.S. to be a get rich (and famous) quick scheme (pp.44-45). It is significant that he rejects his friend Thagney's call to his sense of sharing as less important than self-interest, before he commits his terrible, though comically presented, crime in a quest for recognition (p.67). Although a similar character in terms of his isolation and psychological degeneracy, Dufford could hardly be more different from Halliwell's Malcolm Scrawdyke, since he is without any semblance of the ostensible moralism of the earlier figure. Halliwell has created a character as appropriate to 1969 as Scrawdyke was to 1965.

What is significant about this group of plays, Hare's aside, is the fact that they are almost universally ignored by those critics who cite fringe writers of the post 1968 generation as making the first response to the rise of the New Right. What little attention that has been directed to these plays which were written by the pre 1968 group of writers, on the whole, has often been so scant that rendering of plot and character are frequently inaccurate. Weimer, for instance, in an attempt to locate the most important work of Livings as occurring in the mid sixties, fails to take into account the development, in terms of characters portrayed, represented by Honour and Offer, choosing to compare Henry Cash to his Val Brose (see below) as essentially the same character, a cheerful, working-class anarchist!⁵⁷ But writers from such groups as Portable were certainly at the heart of the attack on the New Right of the seventies, as we shall shortly see, and my intention in discussing plays such as those by Exton and

Saunders is merely to reappropriate them to a group of writers who are more frequently discussed in terms of a narrower movement.

A new attitude to class, particularly the working class, is evident in the period following the revival of the far right in British politics, and as the seventies progressed, writers of black comedy began to take this into account. Particularly notable for this subject matter is Snoo Wilson. Lloyd Evans describes Wilson as an example of the "fairly new conveyor belt of young fire-in-the-belly, militancy-in-the-eye, social-realism-in-the-heart dramatists"⁵⁸, a peculiar analysis in some ways, since Wilson's plays are in no way social realist in execution, being wild and freewheeling surrealism of the most striking kind, but the basis of Lloyd-Evans interpretation is clear enough, since Wilson is relentlessly social in thematic concerns.

Pignight⁵⁹ (1970)⁶⁰ is a case in point. Here, Bravington, a self-made businessman of the shadier kind, with a Northern accent, has bought the pig farm belonging to Roland Mullen, a disillusioned and lobotomised Conservative MP (p.12) who has moved to Australia with his wife. Bravington, seizing the potential for quick cash, plans to dispose of the pigs to Tesco, but while he negotiates the deal, he sends along Raymond, a psychotic bisexual hard man and Jasmine, a prostitute, to look after the property. Smitty, an unbalanced and mentally retarded German ex POW returns to the farm from a mental institution, having worked under Mr. and Mrs. Mullen for many years. After

a brief encounter with Raymond and Jasmine, he murders them horribly. The play amounts to an exploration of various forms of exploitation. Bravington exploits by money, buying Jasmine and Ray in a manner which parallels his purchase of the pigs, and uses his "influence" to warn off his business competitors with violence (p.23). Mr. and Mrs. Mullen are the exploiters of Smitty, who has worked for them for decades and, by the time of his recent exile to a mental institution is being paid one pound ten per week ("what a screw", screams Ray - p.26). Ray gratifies his lust for violence upon Jasmine, whilst Smitty himself exploits the animals, with acts of cruelty to both pigs and dogs. Bravington is the controller of all of the other characters' actions, yet he does not himself appear, being only a disembodied voice throughout. He is never seen with the other characters - their lumpenproletariat world is controlled by *"a heavy Yorkshire accent, fat; he speaks in almost epiglottal whispers"* (p.11). The main control over Ray and Jasmine is by their own right-wing belief structures; Raymond is more in fear of "darkies" and "micks" (p.27) and women, than he is of the power of Bravington and his like, whilst Jasmine is controlled by a bizarre and ironical entrepreneurial ethic, her own brutalisation and poverty are not evident to her, so when Smitty reveals that his tiny wage was his only benefit at the farm, she exclaims:

Nothing? No spin off from thirty bob a week and the use of the potting shed? Never mind. I started with a rotten bloody lot. Business was two pounds reduced to thirty bob. But you don't have to stop at that. With a bit of effort you can make yourself independent. (p.41)

Yet even the entrepreneurship of Bravington is socially determined, exploitation determining exploitation through personal history:

I were a wrestler in Blackpool before I were rich, and famous. You got to look after~yourself, because no-ones going to do it for you. Either do it yourself, or bend over, and get your own membranes stretched.

(Pause)

My own father taught me that when I were twelve. Piss off. He said.

(Pause)

I respect him for that. (p.34)

He is himself a victim of perverse and cruel ironies. "I got everything I want. The conversation of friends and the enjoyment of lovely objects" (p.37), he says, as he attempts sex in a lonely hotel room with Jasmine (we do not see him even here), who loathes him. The violence which ends the play seems inevitable (and is anticipated by the flashback of Bravington's voice reporting the incident to the police at the opening (pp.11-12) and immediately after Smitty has murdered Ray and Jasmine, he cuts out their livers and fries them. As he begins to eat, there is a blackout, and we hear Bravington's voice repeating a speech made earlier beginning, "There's a limit to the amount^{of} pork you can take" (p.43). He goes on to explain, in some detail, his methods of disposing of the pig carcasses to the meat industry. As the nauseating olfactory image of the smell of frying livers reaches the audience, Bravington tells us that it is all a question of "packaging", a grim irony which rebounds upon all of the characters, who have been taken in by

a cultural and philosophical package which leads only to madness and violence.

The idea of an intellectual burden, which leads to destruction through its mythologising by popular culture is also picked up by Vampire (1973)⁶¹. Here Wilson examines, as Styan perfectly puts it three states of "psychological Vampirism - sexual repression, excessive patriotism, racial prejudice"⁶², doing so in three acts set in Victorian, Edwardian and contemporary Britain respectively. In his introduction, Wilson conveys a tremendous historical sensitivity, identifying the Victorian era as a starting point for contemporary historical myth, and the world wars as a consolidation point for the political mythologies which shape the destiny of society. Freeing oneself from the Vampirism of political mythology is a complex problem, for much is accumulated by the language:

Style is power but power corrupts, and politics, as Emerson observed, is a deleterious profession. But there is also nothing which is free of style, of history. Artists who are drawn to the 'primitive' because of its apparent lack of associations with sophisticated contradictions are simply adding another trophy to the jumble of objects in the much fought over warehouse where civilisation is rumoured to reside.⁶³

The first act of Vampire centres around a Victorian family who are ruled by a strict Welsh methodist father, who upon discovering the sexual misbehaviour of his daughter Joy with her sister's intended, casts her out of their home. The way in which she is discovered conveys a farcical scene, in which Joy's two sisters interpret the knockings made by Joy and Rueben

making love as signals from the other side. The supernatural world is ripe for debunking in the seventies (more of that later) and a second fake seance in scene two of the first act witnesses the meeting of Joy, now living in London in reduced circumstances, and her father Davis, whose ideology has brought him to drunkenness and poverty. Another scene of black farce occurs, in which the old man becomes carried away with the imagery of Madame Sugg's seance. "I would like to ask God if he knows what he's doing", demands Davis, and as if in answer, his dead wife, in fact Joy in disguise as a ghost, appears to him. The outrageous coincidence, much loved of the farceur, causes Davis to ignore Madame Sugg's warning that "the bodies you see are astral, you cannot buy them" (p.43), and he chases Joy lustfully around the parlour. In a scene of bizarre violence, Davis rapes Joy in a coffin, as a drunken soldier (deliberately) and Madame Sugg (accidentally) combine to kill everyone present, save for Joy, who after her ordeal, is able to escape (pp.44-49).

In the second act we find ourselves in the middle of the first world war. Three granddaughters of the previous acts' incestuous coupling cheer on a cricket team in England within earshot of the guns in France. Shades of Oh What a Lovely War, but Wilson is interested in a yet more important myth, to which he crosses quickly. Freud and Jung appear, and deliver the child of the pregnant Virgin Mary, who turns out to be not the judeo-christian myth, but the modern camp myth of the Vampire. Once again we are presented with a series of pop cultural icons, the Vampire, Dr. Kildare (in whose costume Jung appears - p.61) and so forth. Significantly, Freud, who is also revealed to be a Vampire, is staked by another figure of disillusioned Toryism,

the dead soldier Henry, who has been killed in the war (pp.63-64).

In the final act we are back in familiar Wilsonian Britain, with a group of social outcasts gathering for the funeral of a Hell's Angel. Dwight, who alludes to her filial antecedents in the previous acts (p.68) is the director of an entrepreneurial funeral home - she has turned her back on the radical traditions of her family, rejecting their former rebellions for an ironically Victorian tradition (p.68) of putting love before other forms of sexual expression. She begins the ceremony in characteristically cynical fashion ("Don't laugh, this is business" - p.70) and reads as text from the life of an obscure saint, which the bikers present clearly do not understand, in a manner which causes them to respond in a great purgation of guilt. Dressed as a pop star, Dwight is a pop cultural icon herself, rejecting all forms of reformism, but like Bravington before her is scarred, in her case by heroin addiction: "I'm getting in on the ground floor for personalised religion. Fairy funerals feed your fabulous habit" (p.74). Dwight celebrates "the triumph of evil over good" (p.76), and as she does so, the coffin opens, and the last Vampire appears. It is almost inevitably Enoch Powell, the ultimate "stylist" of his age, who closes the play with a long treatise on immigration.

This is not, as Ansorge believes, his "most famous speech"⁶⁴, but something better - a tremendously skilful evocation of Powell's "rivers of blood" speech, with alterations which emphasise the element of the great cultural prophet which Powell affected. Consider, for example, the long opening of the speech:

It often occurs in nature that an animal is

fascinated and hypnotised by the danger which threatens it and thus fails to escape or defend itself while it still ^{the} has power. There is a distinct parallel in the fate of nations: whole peoples will watch disaster until it engulfs them, apparently unable to stir out of a horrified trance. Their will is paralysed and they cease to believe in the possibility of action. (pp.76-77)

This parallels Powell's Walsall speech of 1968 (which also made front pages) which opens:

There is a sense of hopelessness and helplessness which comes over persons who are trapped or imprisoned, when all their efforts to attract attention or assistance bring no response. This is the kind of feeling which you in Walsall and we in Wolverhampton are experiencing...⁶⁵

Wilson removes the banality of Walsall and replaces it with Powell's later, less strongly put theme which embraces the whole nation, and makes Powell's prophesy seem all the more prophetic. Similarly the idea of the turning of "whole towns and cities into alien territories"(p.77), from the "rivers of blood" speech, is given greater detail, and Powell's concentration upon numbers and projected population growth which took up most of the "rivers of blood" and later speeches is dropped in favour of his sense of a disastrous "transformation to which there is no parallel in a thousand years of English history".⁶⁶ Wilson has a nose for Powell's most Churchillian moments, such as his "I refuse to believe that the resources of the state are unequal to dealing with it", which is another phrase from a yet later Powell speech.⁶⁷

It is understandable that Powell should be chosen as the figure of the modern pop cultural Vampire, since with the possible exception of Tony Benn, it is difficult to think of a parliamentarian who could speak with such intellectual vigour and emotional power in our period. Wilson wrote the play with Powell in mind, but added that "satire ages quickly, and is often local, so the figure has changed from Colonel Kentucky to the Ayatollah Khomeini, depending on the news of the day" (p.66), yet the same power could not be evoked, surely, by these later figures who were used for subsequent revivals, the former because of his intellectual impoverishment and the latter because of his lack of cultural accessibility to a British audience. Powell is perfect, since his vision of a society running mad ("we must be mad, literally mad as a nation")⁶⁸ is perfectly in tune with the Jacobean sense of societal breakdown and the collapse of belief structures and institutions which Rabey, for example, identifies as central to the Portable theatre house style⁶⁹, although this is not so unique as it may seem, the Jacobean theme having been identified in the dramas of Orton in the sixties.⁷⁰ Powell is an ironic figure of popular culture, railing against the indoctrination of his society, but in doing so performing the role of arch indoctrinator himself, and adding to the insanity of the universe he perceives as mad. Wilson ends his play with ill-omened suddenness, with a blackout cutting off Powell in mid-speech. We have, this seems to suggest, laid the Vampires of past generations, but this one goes on unchecked. It is as much an exhortation to action as any that occurs in black comedy of our period, but true to its genre, gives no particular formula by which this particular pop-cultural ghost can be laid. Indeed, it is by eschewing rigorous

discourse, by simply rejecting societal formulae, that the earlier Vampires were destroyed by those, like Joy, who stand outside any rigorous programme for affirmative action. It is Henry, who has been stripped of his illusions about war and Empire by his death, not the suffragette sisters, who still embrace dogma, that kills the Vampire of the second act. He is a symbol of no positive programme, but the great disillusionment of the lost generation.

The question of New Right economic exploitation and its connection with psychological disintegration is more closely explored in Wilson's next play, The Pleasure Principle (1973)⁷¹, essentially an "eternal triangle" melodrama turned into surrealist fantasy, the triangle being between the married couple Robert and Marien, and Marien's friend Gale, Robert's would-be mistress. On holiday in Ireland, Gale and Marien, who at the opening has separated from Robert, make casual conversation about finding employment for a poor Irish hotel maid, Joan, who immediately takes them at their word and appears with suitcase in hand, ready to follow them back to England (pp.15-17). Compromised into finding the girl a job, Marien is forced into a reconciliation with Robert, who as a property speculator is in Ireland on a project of "snapping up Galway ^{turf} cottages and letting them to sensitive painters". Gale adds: "that sort of exploitation really sickens me" (p.12). Robert finally appears and his crusading entrepreneurialism runs into conflict with Gale's middle class "concerned" liberalism. He opens with a flurry of new right mythology, exemplified by his attack on squatters' rights, which was given some attention by Heath after the Selsdon Park policy review⁷²: "I knew somebody who had a grandmother, and someone came for lunch and stayed for

twenty-five years. And when she threw him out, she was sued" (p.21). At first, Robert claims that money is more important than love, adding:

All these stories about mean rich people, they're true.

(Pause. Considered note)

They're all ^{generally} written from quite the wrong point of view.

(Pause. Robert starts to open a ^{bottle} champagne)

People feel guilty about money. The only thing worth worrying about, if they want to feel guilt, is poverty, because it makes you impossible to live with. If you were poor, Gale, your personality wouldn't rip the skin off a rice pudding. So hang on to your money like grim death is my advice. (p.21)

There is a touch of Andrew Undershaft about this, but the charm quickly wears off, as he fires his champagne cork at Joan, hailing himself as "The spectre of international capitalism - me...stalking the rabbit of non-union labour" (p.22). He then introduces his chauffeur, Mack, an illiterate cockney, whom he extravagantly mistreats, ironically giving reading lessons from the communist manifesto (pp.25-26) and supplying him with endless quantities of marzipan, which sickens Mack and rots his teeth (pp.30-31). This image of gluttony, especially of confectionaries, as a characteric Western evil is a recurrent motif in Wilson's work, perhaps the most cogent example being the force-feeding to death of a dog with aniseed balls in Pignight (pp.20-21). Robert extends a vision of the perfect world of the consumer, looking forward to the day when the whole Western world will be like California (p.31). But these claims

seem increasingly desperate, and Robert goes into the tent erected for their picnic and has a nervous breakdown, with a sudden realisation of poverty, and a world "not like California at all" (pp.32-33).

At this point the first act curtains, and the second (like Vampire, the play is structured as a parody of the well-made play) follows an act primarily about Robert with one primarily about Gale. It opens, after two dancing gorillas provide a cautionary tale about "going too far" (pp.34-36), in her apartment, which is "a model for affluence gone sour" (p.36). After Robert's breakdown, her "neurosis about money" (p.48) has moved into a different phase, and he is going too far in the opposite direction by going about losing money with the same dogmatic singlemindedness with which he had formerly acquired it. Marien wants a corrupt doctor to commit him, whilst Gale's unfocused liberalism has manifested itself in a misguided attempt to look after both Mack and Joan. Joan has to sleep on the balcony (p.38) whilst Mack's bleeding gums, caused by an overindulgence sponsored by Robert, are treated by another glut, this time of Gale's tranquilizers, which leave him completely spaced out (pp.40-41). Gale is too disorganised to feed either of them (p.37) and her only means of eating is realised when Joan is forced to steal from the local grocer. Gale's shock is indicative of the failure of middle class liberals of this generation to come to terms with class as an issue:

~ GALE: Robbing the working classes -

JOAN: I *am* the working classes, I thought you said.

GALE: Of course. I do^{so} beg your pardon.

JOAN: And I've no money^{that} they'll take, so I'm doubly

oppressed.

GALE: In principle I'm delighted you're liberating yourself from the stuffy old capitalist system, I just don't want the flat full of stuffy old policemen.

JOAN: Is this flat yours then?

GALE (*instantly embarrassed*): Well it's a bit complicated. Mummy set up this trust, and the trust undertakes ^{to provide} mortgage rates if they are lower than a short-term lease on a furnished flat would be over a given period. (p.44)

In desperation at her failure with Mack and Joan, Gale goes out and picks up a man, and while she is away Mack returns from the hospital to which Gale's liberalism has sent him, and without the chauffeur's uniform which he has thus far been forced to wear, which has been shed with his subjugation, burgles the flat (p.46). Gale returns with Alko, an American football player in the USAF, whose attempts to consummate^m a one night stand are interrupted by first Mack, who returns quite openly to finish off his robbery, and then Robert, who enters to announce his renunciation of the material world, and his insanity, of which he is inordinately proud. This would be a scene of farcical concealment, were it not for the lack of interest in concealing by all parties, both the copulators and the two separate housebreakers (pp.48-56).

The third act, which explores the dilemmas of Marien, opens in an abandoned circus tent on a rainswept common, which is littered with the props of the previous acts "like ^{the} junkyard of the mind" (p.57). The reconciled Robert and Marien have gone to live there, and Robert attempts to stave

off poverty by being yet another fake mystic (the most striking portrayal of such a figure occurs in Wilson's Alastair Crowley in The Beast, of 1974).⁷³ It is some years on, and Gale is trapped in a repressive marriage with Alko, who has taken the mantle of right-wing bogeyman formerly held by Robert. He rejects the demands of Joan, now nanny to Gale's child, for a pay rise when she points out that she lives on virtual slave labour wages (pp.59-62). His is, once again, the open and unashamed acquisitiveness of the New Right:

Be realistic; we are in competition with the working classes for the means of support - I'm going to make sure I have them, and that goes for my family as well. Joan is not the family, she is the servant, and if she doesn't like it she can get out and work somewhere else! (p.62)

Mack re-emerges, this time, having learned the lessons of Robert in the first act, as a vicious Tory meritocrat, acting on behalf of the council to condemn Robert and Marien's circus tent. Robert is bemused:

ROBERT: Things have come to a pretty pass when the lower classes knife and boot their way into the private armies of the bureaucracy.

MACK: Whereas.

ROBERT: You odious little punk.

MACK: You can't say that to me. Not any more. See, you don't own anything. Don't own any property.

I've got a wife, two kids and we bought a council house. (p.68)

Just as madness looks to overwhelm Robert once more, and Marien is destined to bear a child in poverty, Aeroplane Parker, the

French owner of the tent, a camp Frenchman complete with stripey shirt, beret and so forth, enters, and in a parody of a cliff-hanging happy ending, carries off Robert and Marien to work in his circus. There is a general knees-up and as the audience are given red noses to wear out of the theatre, the characters dance to their exits. All this is monstrously spurious, a huge put-on which makes the goings-on of the play more, not less, disturbing (pp.69-70).

A number of characteristic obsessions come into play in The Pleasure Principle. The idea of the working-class wage slave, suffering from a genuine poverty which is absent from the working class figures of the sixties black comedies, is something which Wilson shares with a great many playwrights of the seventies, but his working class figures, Joan and Mack, are not significantly developed as characters, for although they are as much involved in the action as the other major characters, Wilson is not concerned with the working class here, except as a reflection of middle class neurosis. Their sufferings are deliberately melodramatically presented as indictments of their literal masters' various obsessions. The chorus of talking gorillas perform the function of pointing out the dogmatic and absurd positions which Robert, Gale, Alko and, to a lesser extent, Marien (whose stultifying conventionality is another dogma) put themselves into in attempts to order their world. Like Bravington, they are made even more disturbed by their money, which gives them greater power to act upon their hard-line commitments. Myth also plays a major part in the play, and is debunked by Gale's fantasy of being ravaged by a swan, enacted in a dream sequence upon the stage, with wooden swans, and finally consummated^m by Robert, an inadequate Zeus,

indeed (pp.65-66). This sexual obsession which finally fails to bring fulfilment parallels the political obsessions of the characters, just as Ireland, benighted by religion, parallels England, blinded by its class structure. But Wilson comes out with no answer to the mental quagmires and material dilemmas which surround all of the characters, pointing out that an adherence to political and material sacred cows leads to madness, but offering nothing but an inconclusive ending, as the Vampires, once again, are yet to be staked.

In Blowjob (1971)⁷⁴ we return to the proletarian milieux of Pignight. The play opens with a tableau of yet more gluttony, with "a table which overflows with bottles of beer and empty cans" (p.47). Around it are two skinheads, Mo and Dave, and a security guard, McVittie, one of whose clients is about to be robbed by the skins. The skinheads, after a long, slow opening in which they perform a drag act and discuss their backgrounds, break into the home of an ageing and reclusive homosexual, Cottrel, whom they assault with a hammer, before attempting to blow his safe. In the yard outside McVittie arrives and attempts to coax a schizophrenic girl, Moira, with an obsession with social psychology, off the wall. Dave and Mo attempt to escape at McVittie's appearance and McVittie's guard dog picks up a piece of their gelignite, blowing itself to pieces and badly injuring McVittie. The skinheads are picked up by the police as Moira climbs down and cuts the security guard's throat with a razor. The play sounds like relentless social realism explained in these terms, and the outbursts of the characters about their backgrounds and social dilemmas would appear to reinforce this. "Nobody's got their fucking thumb on the scale for me", complains Mo, "if I had an E Type and lots of birds it

would be alright" (p.47). He simultaneously displays his social deprivation and a dedication to materialism which one senses, will eventually bring him low even at this early stage. Mo details a background which is inevitably socially determined and at the same time displays a reactionary nature, including racism, which keeps him firmly within his world:

I mean it doesn't exactly give you a flying start as a Greek ship owner, does it. They used to come round every time someone stole a fucking banana from the wogshop. So you get used to it. Being a villain. (p.48)

Dave, too, will "only do a job if the money's right" (p.68). He plainly exists on slim pickings, yet he seems to retain an achievement ethic, as if he were Raffles, rather than a desperate youth doing violent robberies in Tranmere. McVittie, too, is impoverished and forgotten. "I'm doing a dull job for thirty pounds a week and I don't like dogs", he says miserably to Moira (p.72), and in reply she provides him with a series of stories of social deprivation in Liverpool (pp.72-73). Yet all this happens, not in the context of social realism, but fantastic comedy.

The familiar theme of social alienation from those higher up in the social scale is again brought out, with the voice of McVittie's boss on the walkie talkie. When the gay security guard calls for assistance, he simply receives a series of homophobic taunts (pp.60-61) from the voice of a man, who, like Bravington, does not appear among the low lives he controls. But it is the voice that ultimately shapes the destiny of all those on stage. Having refused to assist McVittie, the voice of social hierarchy then arranges the arrest of the young people,

without even having to appear before them (p.84). With songs, one liners and drag acts, Wilson creates a depression within his audience which would be difficult to shake off on leaving the theatre, yet even here, there is no suggestion of an alternative to the lives of this economically and spiritually impoverished group of characters, who are trapped by a reactionary ideology which is purely destructive to them.

Mercer's After Haggerty (1970)⁷⁵, also takes up the theme of the working class bigot who is influenced by the reactionary political attitudes of the "Powell era", and who has been made the prime example of Mercer's lack of contact with his working class roots. The play posits the invasion of the home of Bernard Link, a declasse drama critic, by a succession of characters who uproot the comfortably guilty liberal existence to which he nonchalantly admits (p.30). There is first an American woman, Claire, whose one aim is to locate Haggerty, her husband, who, it eventually transpires, has gone off to fight in a Guerilla war in Africa, and is killed. She imposes on Bernard, for although she is herself a liberal of very considerable personal wealth, she likes to see a fellow liberal suffer, rather than live in a hotel (p.23). There are also Roger and Chris, two builders who are familiar figures in the seventies, "servants for people who are not used to having servants" as it is put elsewhere, people who are employed as menials for the middle classes - Bernard has employed many in the past (p.17). They are all familiar figures of the period, but the character who, whilst conforming to stereotype, is yet one of the most emotionally riveting of the period, is Bernard's working class father. This man is the quintessence of the Powellite reactionary, being influenced by all the cant of the New Right

- he is racist (p.48), homophobic (p.57), sexist (pp.63-64), upholds antiquated Victorian sexual morality (pp.67-68) and even attacks the working standards and overpayment of the modern working class (p.84), yet for all that he is a character of great pathos, whose inability to establish a line of political communication with his son parallels his inability to show Bernard affection. He finally declares his love, too late, after Bernard enacts a bizarre ritual in which he places a funeral wreath (sent by Haggerty as a black joke anticipating his own death) over the head of his father, a gesture, it would seem, of purgation, of exorcism of guilt over his failure of his father's expectations (pp.88-92). But Bernard's own ideological alternatives are as inadequate as his father's, and he is shown giving lectures in a succession of Stalinist trouble spots where dissenters are dealt with by brutality, leaving Bernard with no positive political direction. Itzin carries an account of Mercer's polemic with D.A.N. Jones, who complained, in an article in The Listener, that Mercer's portrayal of the working class was invariably demeaning, citing After Haggerty as a prime example of this phenomenon, and thereby questioning Mercer's left wing credentials. Mercer's reply is eloquent, indicating the autobiographical elements of the play⁷⁷ (Mr. Link is based upon Mercer's own father), as well as the contemporary relevance of the figure, as a defence against the ideological assault, which would in fact be repeated by Chambers and Prior in almost the same words after Mercer's death.⁷⁷ The father character was a figure

insidiously incorporated into the myths of class-mobility and consumer consumption which began to take hold after the fall of Attlee's government in

1952 (sic) [...] a man humiliated and uncomprehendingly wounded by the tide of events around him, which left him washed up on his small anachronistic rock, prime fodder, due to his estrangement and bitterness for the reactionary atmosphere and neo-fascist myths so artfully disseminated in the seventies - from Mrs. Thatcher on the left, so to speak, to the National Front on the right.⁷⁸

David Cregan's The Land of The Palms (1972)⁷⁹ represents an interesting and illustrative contrast to his earlier work (Arthur aside) which incorporates the spirit of a changed political situation. Unusually, Cregan steps outside of Britain in his portrayal of a group of fanatical idealists. On the one hand there is Paula, a captain in the Foreign Legion, and her squad Jim and Robert, who have held out as legionnaires in the desert, even after their regiment has been disbanded. Betrayed by the political and military establishment, they uphold their traditions with a cry of "death to the politicians" (p.9) and march off to an oasis of which Paula knows, there to create their ideal world of prayer, traditional values and military discipline. On the other hand, a group of equally English intellectuals have chosen the very same spot in the Sahara to create a new society; Moles (the leader), Ada, Bobbie, Louis and Kate are liberals who are equally disillusioned with the politicians of their country (p.17). The problem is exacerbated by the farcical coincidence of their all knowing each other from their former lives in England. The problem is clear enough, and is definitively put by Robert's hatred of his sworn enemy Louis Thompson of Reading, "a damned liberal thinker" (p.31) and Bobbie's equally hostile description of Robert as "a no-good

hung up twisted and brutal fascist" (p.34). Its attempted resolution by the contrivance of relationships between the various parties by Paula ("infiltrate his girlfriend", Paula instructs Robert, in an attempt to win power over Louis - p.32) is familiar territory for Cregan where the relationships between the characters of Three Men for Colverton, Miniatures and Transcending are equally central to political control. So, too is the sacrificial ending, where Robert commits suicide (p.64), recalling the death of Ched and the attempted suicide of Joe Johnson. But the differences are quite illustrative of the more confrontational seventies. Paula perceives her political problem as one eventually resolvable only by confrontation. She constantly threatens the liberals with guns, whilst her reaction to the discovery of people of disparate opinions is immediate: "We have a problem here that must be obvious to you. Which point of view is going to win?" (p.22). She then breaks into song: "Someone will surely come out on top/And rule all the others and make them hop/It's the way of the world and it will not stop" (p.23).

All this runs in stark contrast with the "oblique" handling of power by such characters as the High Tory, upper class Mrs. Carnock, as does the middle class and meritocratic background of all the characters, typified by Robert's and Louis' encounters with each other at Grammar School (p.42). Whilst fanatical characters such as Dorman are eventually drawn into the consensus which prevails in Colverton, the resolution of The Land of The Palms seems destined to violent confrontation. The liberal group are seen to uphold latent consensus values, thus the "sordid act of political intrigue" (p.29) by which Moles replies to Paula's manipulation by

encouraging the relationship between Jim and Kate - the gesture is ineffective, but the relationship proves to be felicitous. What Cregan is concerned to explore here is the psychology of fanaticism, particularly as it applies to the legionnaires, upon whom he focuses greater audience attention. For Robert, whose belief structures are so mentally self-destructive, the world needs to be ordered, thus his joining of the military, and his focusing of all of his neurotic attention upon a single adolescent incident, which he apocryphally imputes to Louis, as the source of all his problems:

That was the moment of greatest revelation in my life. My own opinions were suddenly confirmed, and I felt a whole black universe rising up behind me, and focusing through me on that one disfiguring element in the whole of creation, Louis Thompson of Reading. (p.50)

So, too, all order breaks down for Robert when he discovers Paula's liaison with Moles. This is a purely tactical exercise on both parts, but to Robert it is a lapse of discipline. Once again the victim of a misunderstanding imposed by a black and white perception of the world, Robert's whole world collapses, and he shoots himself (pp.61-64).

In Measure for Measure (1972)⁸⁰, Howard Brenton moves us away from the metaphysics of delusion on the right, and back to a more direct examination of Enoch Powell. I am not reluctant to include Brenton's adaptation as an original play, since only the barest bones of narrative remain of Shakespeare, and even here, the ending is altered to fit Brenton's black comic resolution. So true to life was Brenton's Angelo that the threat of libel from the Exeter town council (the play was

originally performed at the Northcote) forced alterations to the script.⁸¹ Brenton also points out the damaging nature of fanatacism. When the Duke hands over power to Angelo, the Powell figure, the people of Soho are in fear of their future:

JERKY: The man's...Hysterical.

POMPEY: Oh that 'e's not. 'E's dead cold.

JERKEY: Think so?

POMPEY: Cold and pure.

JERKY: I'm surprised to hear such an experienced pimp call any man pure.

POMPEY: I do believe 'e is. Pure in heart. God help us all. (p.97)

But Angelo's puritanism is seen by Brenton as just another device for the gaining of power, a very effective piece of PR. In his attempted seduction of Isabella who is interceding on behalf of Claudio (still her brother, but in this version a black porno film star and pop musician), she at first comically misunderstands his overtures, until he exclaims "pay attention you black bitch" (p.119) and explains his intentions quite clearly. Her threat to expose him is greeted with a confession of the true nature of the man:

Who'll believe you? In the public's eye I'm pure.

Austere. They think I'm a righteous bastard, oh yes, a bit of a prig, oh yes. But my purity?

Unapproachable [...] And are they going to believe their poker-faced, darling leader....is a lecher?

Particularly when told by the likes of you.

(p.120)

Brenton sets up a vision of a society dominated by a catalogue of New Right imperatives. Free speech is restricted, as an

agitator is rounded up by the police, while an attempt to intercede by Isabella, a born again christian in this version, elicits the jeer "Get back to the jungle" from the arresting policeman, whilst a bowler-hatted bystander mutters his approval (pp.108-110). The issue of public approval of such attitudes, of Powell's popularity, is raised by the agitator, who cries vainly "You bloody idiots. The bosses'll have you all bashing the blacks. 'Stead of 'emselves. They're sitting at the Ritz farting and laughing 'emselves sick" (p.109). His failure is illustrated by Jerky's remark that Claudio's head is to be chopped off for his activities, which will "go down great on the News at Ten" (p.112). Although Powell himself is portrayed as sane and pragmatic, he is wise enough to appeal to a "market" for repression and violence. Mental aberration is part of this appeal, even in such figures as the Duke, of whose approval of Angelo, Juliet says fiercely "Old men. You're no better than the dirty mackers who come to see Claudio an' me in the movie, Law and Order? It's like porn to you. One big jerk off!" (p.123).

Brenton is at pains to portray Britain in its historical context, and the play contains much satire of the old High Tory order, represented by the Duke, who was portrayed as a Macmillan figure in the original production.⁸² The Duke is taken in by Angelo, like the British public, and his only suspicions centre around the class prejudice of the upper classes against the meritocrat:

DUKE: Don't believe it! Never like the man, a cold fish...Severe. Works eighteen hours a day, doesn't smoke, vegetarian, non-alcoholic..a frosty character. But upright. Severe, and that's no

bad thing in a public man, just what the country needs.

A Change

But he is a grammar school boy. And like all grammar school boys, brilliant but unreliable...

In the end, when you come down to it, not bred to rule. (p.129)

Powell, of course, was a grammar school boy of middle class origins, his parents being schoolteachers, and it was he, not Thatcher, who introduced the political theme of contempt for the old moneyed class. The bitter division is evident in his final exchange with the Duke:

Sir, we were at fault ever to encourage you. We raised you up, against our better judgement. Now we slap you down.

ANGELO: Who is this 'We'? The English Ruling Class.

DUKE: (*Loses his temper*) Don't you sneer at me, you damn little snivelling upstart! At my school you'd not have been fit to fag for me! (pp.160-61)

But the Duke is defeated and sent off into retirement with a contrived case of the traditional "ill health" of the unpopular Tory, after the fashion of Macmillan himself, according to some commentators. Evil triumphs over not quite so evil, and we are left with Angelo's closing address:

ANGELO (*aside*) I offer this view of history. It is a paradox. The old order, unchecked, will bring forth a new and far harsher form of itself. Call me cynical if you will, but I welcome that. For the truth of the matter is, I find myself to be that new order. Unchecked. Therefore, I will

proceed to fashion the England of my dreams. And you shall learn that where power has rested, there it shall rest. For a thousand years. (p.163)

Brenton's Magnificence (1973)⁸³ also picks up the theme of the old order of Tory giving way to a more vicious group. Brenton introduces us to Babs and Alice, the former a retired Conservative cabinet minister, the latter still serving with, and as part of, the new generation. Babs is an old wet who has been put out to grass, like Butler or Boyle, at his old college, on this occasion, in Cambridge. He invites Alice up to Cambridge on the day of his death, to put him in mind of some home (pronounced hume) truths. Faced with hostility from maoist students who are as fanatical as Alice (p.42), Babs relieves his misery by assaulting the values of his successor in power. In a speech frequently quoted by critics, he regales Alice:

And Alice, my dear, you are a fascist. Oh, I don't mean jackboots and ~~G~~otterdammerungs. You are a peculiarly modern, peculiarly English kind of fascist. Without regalia. Blithe, simple-minded and vicious. I hate you. You scare me sick. Mao had better come quick, for I think there's a danger, a very real and terrible danger, that *you* may inherit the earth. (p.48)

Alice is in fact asleep while Babs delivers his much rehearsed speech, and the dying man manages in the end one swift reference, rather than this long tract on Alice's political nature, a sad commentary upon his life. But this is not Alice's last appearance in the play. He outlives Babs to reappear at the finale as the subject of Jed's misconceived assassination attempt, a reflection, perhaps, of the equally disorganised

attempt on the life of Robert Carr by the Situationist Angry Brigade in 1971. Here, Brenton shows us a capacity for character development which he had shown in none of his earlier plays, least of all Measure for Measure, since Alice reappears a broken man. Babs' final attack upon Alice (Brenton seems to ignore the small inconsistency of plot, here) has affected his conscience in such a way as to cause him a debilitating sense of self-doubt, "the old High Tory's last throw at me" (p.64) has left him feeling "Queer, failed and fifty"(p.69). Jed has not done his research properly - instead of assassinating the Minister for the Environment, who he feels had a direct stake in his own demise and the loss of his child, he finds himself caught with a sad old man, demoted from a major ministerial post to a minor one (p.68), and an explosive device that will not explode. Suddenly and brilliantly Brenton repersonalises his characters with a single adventurous device, one which seems to have gone surprisingly unnoticed by the critics, that of a mask, which obscures Alice's face and which is intended to blow off his head. When it does not explode it is removed and Alice ceases to become a symbol of repression and is instead a person again, with a face. At its removal each of the two men become people angry and frightened in their own situations, irretrievably cut off from one another by their experience, but loaded with real sympathy:

ALICE: You young thug. I'm trying to be brave.

JED: So am I!

ALICE: Some dignity...You must allow.

JED: Me too.

ALICE: Yes, yes of course...Though I don't see why.

JED: I could beat you, I could beat you now!

ALICE: C...Come on then!

JED: Oh Christ! (p.69)

But Jed cannot attack Alice, and finally throws down the mask, which he has been holding, and accidentally detonates it, killing them both with cruel arbitrariness, at a point where an uneasy truce is developing. For all the "blame" of Alice's "FUCKING HUMANITY" (p.70), Jed is manifestly consumed by the same feelings before his death. There is a lively critical debate about which view, if any, of social change has been endorsed by Magnificence, which has been added to by the author's self-contradictory statements about the play. On the one hand he confirms, in an interview, Hayman's view that the play supports Cliff⁸⁴, the social democrat, who delivers the curtain line, over the bodies of Jed and Alice: "The waste of your anger. Not the murder, murder is common enough. Not the violence, violence is everyday. What I can't forgive you Jed, my dear, dead friend, is the waste" (p.71). But Brenton also told other critics that the main object of his political sympathy was Jed⁸⁵, leading Itzin to claim that Brenton's view is that of the revolutionary.⁸⁶ Kerensky complains of the obscurity of the play's ending, which Brenton himself acknowledged to him, by regretting the relative insignificance of Cliff to the play's ultimate structure⁸⁷, but perhaps this is more due to Brenton's formal choice. The play suffers a little from its (admittedly funny) grim humour, as when the inconsistency of plot is supplied by the slumbering listener joke mentioned earlier on and in the pathos which Brenton intends to equate with the death of Babs, which is undermined by the old gag about the seemingly dead man, who suddenly revives with a trivial outburst (p.50). So too, the contrast of painstaking social realism (the scenes

involving the student squatters) with outrageous comic grotesquerie (these involving the policeman, and, in Alice's case, the first of the two involving the Tory MPs) makes for a difficult resolution of a play which has veered wildly from one form to another; perhaps Brenton's ambiguity of political attitude is reflected in his black comic, social realist, stylistic choices. Certainly in later plays, such as his The Churchill Play (1974)⁸⁸ or Weapons of Happiness (1976)⁸⁹, Brenton is less ambiguous in both stylistic questions and his endorsement of a single, but admittedly complex and often despairing, political solution. Magnificence seems to catch him half-way between his black comic and social realist phases, just as it is also, as Bull points out, a mid point between his transition from fringe artist to writer of plays for National stages.⁹⁰

Just as in Magnificence Brenton is interested in those among us whose unchallengeable metaphysic leads them to approach a self-ordered world with puritanical zeal, so too is David Hare in Knuckle (1974).⁹¹ Curly Delafield, the arms dealer, has been condemned, like Richard III, to being evil by the circumstances of his life, and therefore has decided, through his profession, to be the quintessence of this evil. Much of his self proclaimed cynicism is a calculated affront to the civilised values of his father, Patrick, a stockbroker who, as Ansorge puts it, "reads Henry James by night and ruins men by day".⁹² Curly is extremely puritanical, stoicly refusing to either drink or smoke, because "No pleasure isn't more pleasurable for being denied" (p.46). He has come back to Guildford to ascertain the fate of his sister who has disappeared, apparently either the victim of suicide or murder.

Curly finds himself in a country still more decadent than the one he left twelve years before. It is, he says, "a jampot for swindlers and racketeers. Not just [in] property" (p.55). Money is again an ideal, a moral code in this world, the only one that counts. When Patrick asks Curly why he is an arms dealer, Curly replies, "it's more glamorous than just making money" and receives the instant riposte "*Just making money?*" (p.29). This is a world where, as in Leonardo's Last Supper, the Gods themselves are identified with the enterprise culture; thus when Jenny becomes over emotional about the "death" of Sarah, she cries out "Return John Bloom to your kingdom. Jack Cotton arise from your grave. Harry Hyams, claim your children" (p.57). All other values have been subsumed by money as a touchstone of morality. Patrick endorses the "broader based values [...] of a traditional education" (p.30), but his form of Toryism is subsumed by the ruthless acquisitiveness of the new man, which, he eventually admits, is simply the old forms without the robes of civility. Curly's attacks upon his father constantly parallel his own trade with that of Patrick. Just as Patrick claims that if he didn't do property speculation, someone else would (pp.81-82), so too, Curly diminishes his own responsibility for his actions, claiming casually "I don't pick the fights, I just equip them" (p.39). But because ultimately Patrick, with only a little pushing, is prepared to admit his own degradation (p.84), Curly's gestures seem pointless.

Perfunctory gestures are in fact the only expression of morality in Knuckle. Just as Max takes a substantial bribe from Patrick to keep quiet about the property deal with which he has sullied his hands (Patrick does not fear the police, his end of the deal's legitimate, but Sarah, who will be able to use it

against him in a domestic context - p.75), and gives half of it to a revolutionary organisation (p.80), so Sarah rebels with the paltry and bathetic gesture of running away to Surbiton (p.45). The need to conceal, but the sheer pointlessness of concealing any public or political act leads to a fetish for private concealment, for a form of taboo which is needed only as a prurient private device, as with Malloy, the stockbroker:

He liked to put a brown paper bag over his head
- this will amuse you - then take all his clothes
off. He did this in the company of other English-
men of the same age and class. They ran round in
circles. With straps. They never saw each other's
faces. Malloy said - the pleasure was not in the
whipping. Or in the paper bags. The pleasure was
^{going to}
in the Stock Exchange the next day and trying to
work out which of your colleagues you'd whipped the
night before. (p.49)

Respectability in this world is something purely private, artificially divided by a vast gap from the neatly cordoned-off "public" world. Patrick's absolute respectability, his defensiveness about his relationship with his housekeeper, runs in stark contrast to his immoral profession, about which he displays no qualms. Whilst he can openly state that he is happy to discreetly attack those who work ("the exploitation of the masses should be conducted as quietly as possible" - p.44), he becomes exceptionally annoyed when his son speculates about the nature of his relationship with the elderly Mrs. Dunning (pp.33-34). The separateness of the two moralities is a perversion, but one which is needed to keep Patrick going, just as is absolute probity in the face of his daughter's attacks more

important than integrity in the eyes of the law.

Hare's play makes a significant comparison with the other great parody detective story in our period, Loot. Orton's model is the English detective story, with someone having something to hide, and the brilliant detective entering to unravel the dark secrets of a group of characters who are apparently upright. Hare on the other hand moves, as was endlessly pointed out in the play's contemporary reviews, into a Mickie Spillane world, very much an American model, and one, it was complained, which could not sustain the "sheer weight of what it's asked to convey".⁹³ The critics (Billington in this case) however, fail to recognise the subtlety of the comparison, for in the American model of detective fiction, the detective moves in a cynical world, where integrity is not the norm, but the deviation. It is also the perfect vehicle for Hare's dialogue:

PATRICK: We met once. Neutral ground. Trafalgar Square. She took to wearing white. We had to argue things out. We talked about - no, I can't tell you.

CURLY: What?

PATRICK: We talked about what we believed.

CURLY: How disgusting.

PATRICK: I suppose you have to get your hands dirty sometimes.

CURLY: And what did she believe?

PATRICK: I can't remember. (p.46)

There are no shocking revelations to be made in this world, but Curly's quest for the truth mirrors his sister's desire "that everyone should know everything" (p.50). His fanatic's perception of the world, the idea that "under the random surface

of events lie steel-grey explanations. The more unlikely and implausible the facts the more rigid the obscene geometry below" (p.84), is of no real use, since even with the unsavoury facts laid bare, there is, as with Brenton's Powell figure, no possibility of action: "Newspapers can be bought, judges can be leant on, politicians can be stuffed with truffles and cognac. Life's a racket, that we know" (p.71). For all that, Jenny makes a final gesture of morality. Armed with a letter from Sarah proving that she is still alive, and the story of Patrick, who has come clean, she goes to a newspaper, but is not believed. It is she who holds out, while Curly goes "back to my guns", but there is no final affirmation of justice in Knuckle, Hare is true to his stylistic choices. It is a play which is taken up almost entirely by its narrative structure - the plot is everything to Knuckle - yet the uncovering of the truth is ironically redundant to the play's characters.

In Brassneck (1973)⁹⁴, Brenton's and Hare's collaboration on the Poulson Affair, David Edgar finds an example of work which "clearly arise[s] out of the spectacle-disruptive, situationist era of the late 1960's". He bases this analysis on the fact that the play takes the vehicle of "the hoary old stand-by, the chronicle of a family through three generations" and inverts audience expectations about such a formal structure.⁹⁵ Yet the grotesque travestying of family melodrama was also a familiar technique of black comic dramatists of the mid-sixties, notable examples being Orton's Entertaining Mr. Sloane or Wood's Fill The Stage with Happy Hours (1966)⁹⁶, whilst a similar historical perspective is taken in Milner's How's The World Treating You?, which will be discussed in detail below.

What is most notable in Brassneck is its topicality. First produced during the trials of John Poulson, T. Dan Smith, George Pottinger and Andy Cunningham, in the wake of the disgrace and resignation of Reginald Maudling as well as of two other MPs, Albert Roberts (Labour) and John Cordle (Conservative), with implications towards a massive web of corruption throughout the British mainland, the play represents a typically detailed contemporary response to the scandal, linking it with a great many black comedies throughout our period. Each major character in the Poulson Affair has an equivalent in the Bagley saga of the play.⁹⁷ Roderick Bagley, the Poulson figure, is, like J.G.L. Poulson, a poor architect, but a ruthless entrepreneur whose very limited business acumen is propped up by his uncle Alfred Bagley (in Poulson's case, this role was played by his father, but, like earlier black humourists when dealing with the aristocracy, Brenton and Hare are reluctant to provide Bagley with evidence of fertility) a successful small business man, and landlord to much slum housing. Roderick Bagley is supported in his corrupt business dealings by his local Labour MP, Harry Edmunds, just as Poulson was by his own Labour MP, Albert Roberts. T. Dan Smith is portrayed by Tom Browne, a local Labour power broker who, like Smith, is head of a large PR firm, specialising in the promotion of his master's interests. The Maudling figure is picked up by Raymond Finch, whose role is succinctly described by Browne:

When out of office will offer Governmental expertise
in Private Industry. Keeps his skills greased.
Will offer them around. A worthy man, a worthwhile
man to have on the notepaper. Slipping in and out
of Government to lend out a face everybody knows

they know. A respectable man, respected, a blazer for other men to wear. Ministers available, cut out the form at the back of the investor's chronicle. Now Roderick Bagley's accredited Representative, well paid, a man for all notepaper. What kind of man was this? (p.75)

The audience is led to an answer which would not be welcomed by the play's characters.

What is brought to the fore in the portrayal of the New Right figures of the play is the responsibility of the Labour Party in bringing forward the new political grouping. In this respect Brassneck looks back to such writers as Exton and Saunders. Edmunds is thus taken aback by Browne:

EDMUNDS: Because I find that man deeply offensive. People should be one thing or another. You can't work for Roderick Bagley and be big wheel in Transport House. I mean what does Tom believe? Rod's a right-wing Tory...

ROCHESTER: It's all public relations...

EDMUNDS: How does Tom do it? In his mind? Is it bow tie and dicky for Roderick? And a baggy old suit for Transport House? I mean, what does Roderick feel? Working with a man 'oo's blatantly Labour...

ROCHESTER: They're both intelligent men...

EDMUNDS: And what does that mean?

ROCHESTER: Well...you know how it is.

BASSETT: Oh aye.

EDMUNDS: Oh aye. (p.65)

Yet Edmunds himself is, like the ex communist Browne (T. Dan

Smith was also a communist in the fifties), a man prepared to sell himself for quick profit, justifying his actions with the words of T. Dan Smith ("I'll work with anyone to do good for the people of this country" - p.71) in an elaborate self-deception to retain his political purity. From the election of 1945 onwards, the play implies, the Labour Party has been drawn steadily into a corrupt establishment. The imagery associated with this establishment is significantly archaic and ritualised - Brenton and Hare make particular use of the imagery of Masonic Lodges in the early part of the play (pp.18-24, pp.34-35), something of an agit-prop liberty where the actual T. Dan Smith and Albert Roberts were concerned, for although Poulson gained significant business advantages through the Masons, Smith and Roberts were not themselves members. But the rituals of the early part of the play slowly disappear, to be replaced by the openly self interested characters and actions of the contemporary period. A cogent contrast to the decadent formalities of the scenes set in the forties and fifties is the final image, where the corrupt property speculators, Roderick aside, gather to plan their next market initiative, the trafficking and sale of heroin, as a strip tease is performed before them (pp.101-102). It is a striking image, for once again we are presented with a signifier of a world in which nothing is to be concealed - within a year, the same scene, involving property speculators at a strip tease, had been repeated in Churchill's Owners, and Lindsay Anderson's film O Lucky Man (1973)⁹⁸, which reflects the specific images of 1972/73 as clearly as If had picked up earlier motifs. Brassneck finds a visual equivalent of the earlier degeneration of values represented by the speeches of characters in The

Borage Pigeon Affair where such figures as Badger (p.285) and the Landlady (p.290) are made to repeat earlier speeches in a form which no longer conceals their motives through euphemism or political cliché.

Of Barnes' The Bewitched (1974)⁹⁹ it should be observed that it is the first, and to my knowledge, the only black comedy to confront head-on the issue of Britain's entry into the Common Market. In the decayed empire of Carlos II of Spain we are confronted with a group of squabbling consensus-style politicians in a world which has so collapsed, that a choice must be made to ally with the outside world of either Bavaria or Austria (pp.207-212) in order to stave off economic ruin. As Britain of 1974 sailed toward the Referendum on the EEC promised by the newly elected Labour administration so, too, the choice was frequently presented as being between the two expediciencies of either Europe or the USA. Once again, money dominates as an absolute value - as Monterrey remarks: "In a world of tawdry values and vanishing ideals, I sometimes think money's the only decent thing left" (pp.207-208). Into such a world comes the inevitable fanatic. Father Froylan, meritocratic, puritanical and newly risen¹⁰⁰, propounds the populist solution, as did Powell, whereby the country may remain completely independent. The crux of the matter is Carlos' almost complete impotence and sterility, which will not allow the production of an heir to the throne, and thereby a continuation of independence. Just as Powell gained popularity on the issue of the EEC by appealing to the traditional sense of "little England" which was bound to strike a chord with the general population, so Froylan argues for a traditional solution - Carlos cannot procreate because he is "bewitched". The fear of mob rule by an extreme popular

demagogue which manifested itself in black comedy from If There Weren't Any Blacks You'd Have to Invent Them onwards once again appears here, as the old consensus politicians are pushed aside, and Pontecarrero is left lamenting, as the consensus politicians of the seventies might have lamented: "The prospect's midnight black f'us all, (*shudders*) he's *sincere* " (p.307).

Joe Orton once complained of a new, "permissive society" version of A Flea in Her Ear, which presented the characters as if they were modern pop-stars, except in period dress: "Now it wouldn't be funny if Mick Jagger were caught in a brothel, but if Harold Wilson were caught in a brothel it would be extremely funny".¹⁰¹ What is at the heart of Orton's humour is the quest for something which must be concealed, a source for the hypocrisy of authority figures, be they psychiatrists (Dr. Prentice), policemen (Truscott), parody meritocrats (Ed) or priests (Pringle). The same could be said for a legion of other writers of the middle to latter sixties, like Henry Livings, Paul Ableman or John Antrobus. The choice of farce as a vehicle for satire in a world in which, as Dr. Prentice puts it "Ruin follows the accusation, not the vice", is an obvious one. The world of farce for earlier writers, is a deterministic one only in the sense that the characters are propelled by ungovernable instincts and uncontrollable desires. They are, for all that, responsible for their own fates. As Davis, in her book on farce, puts it:

One feels that, despite the impersonal nature of

the comic mechanisms at work - coincidence, snow-balling confusions, interferences and reversals - the collective selfish egos of the victims are to blame for their problems.¹⁰²

Somewhere along the line, the sufferings of characters are their own responsibility, thus the dim self-awareness of Trixie and Baba, or the articulate self-contempt of Jim in Come and Be Killed. So too, characters such as Low, in Orton's Up Against It are repeatedly warned of their folly - p.10 (in this case, the desire to lend a helping hand to the afflicted), but still walk into self-made traps. The sixties satires also reflect the affluent society, since the excuse of social deprivation does not exist. Even at the lowest end of the social scale, such as the unemployed Wilson in Orton's The Ruffian on The Stair (1964)¹⁰³ who claims that "our life was made quite comfortable by the NAB" (p.49), no excuse for anti-social behaviour exists. The living of life in hock (like the life of the nation) in Trixie and Baba, where the characters find their small business down to its last pound note, is something to be aware of, but as in this play, poverty never actually materialises as an issue. So too, it is possible to allegorise the state of the nation through the goings-on of a public school, where whatever else may be a problem, money is not in question.

Social determinism, however, becomes a major issue for later writers. Characters are propelled by circumstances which they are helpless to act upon. In Blowjob, Moira's first speech seems to equate her current state of psychological breakdown with her job of posting junk mail (p.54), whilst all of the other characters pursue their inevitably self destructive courses in a manner which equates the dilemmas of their material

circumstances with their capacity for crime or anti-social behaviour. In Wilson's plays people are controlled by forces either above them in a social hierarchy, who are entirely absent from their lives, or by circumstances that they misconceive, such as the fake seances of Vampire. Here too, although the characters are of slightly higher social caste, they have their behaviour determined for them by personal history, which stretches back generationally through more than a hundred years. Even Dwight's behaviour in rejecting her personal history is, in that rejection, an affirmation of its influence, in that she clutches at intractable dogmas as a means of escaping her past. So too, are the characters of The Pleasure Principle, or at least those whose behaviour is not directly controlled by their middle class masters, manipulated by their attempt to impose a didactic scheme of things upon their world.

Mercer's Bernard Link is similarly imposed upon by personal history, but more than this, his world, and that of the other characters is determined by another unseen presence over whom he has no control, that of Haggerty, a man ~~that~~ Bernard has never met, but who, through anticipatory telegrams, is able to not only predict, but also control the interaction of the other characters. Similarly, in Have You Any Dirty Washing, Mother Dear?, the Prime Minister, who does not appear, but telephones the committee while apparently drunk (pp.164-65) adds to the sense of despair one feels about the assembled group by creating the sense of an authority to whom they all answer, which is as out of control as the MPs. In the apparently dead Sarah, personal history once again motivates the world of Knuckle. The entire play is taken up with finding out precisely

how this character interacted with the others. In The Land of The Palms everyone concerned with the dramatic interaction is present, but once again, it is the imagined slights and misinterpreted relationships of their past lives in England which leads to the ugly, comical climax of the play. In The Borage Pigeon Affair, the vast, seemingly uncontrollable social problems, rooted in the post-war history of England, of immigration, causes most of the problems, whilst the spurious problem of the pigeons which leads to the downfall of Garnish is stirred up by a character, Franklin Sear, who although present throughout the dramatic action, is a character who, when Garnish finally meets him, he does not even know - this despite the fact that Sear is his daughter's lover. This is in fact a cue to the complex interpersonal relationships of the play, the ironical and undermining personal factor which is also demonstrated by Garnish's affair with Mrs. Badger. But Sear is, on the whole, an exception for his presence, to a general rule. If absence can be said to be a stage image, it is a strong and useful one to this group of dramatists, in representing the enormous influence of dark or unseen presences which powerfully, and without possibility of reply, determine the actions of relatively helpless stage presences.

In such circumstances, farce is difficult to invoke, since the characters can in no way answer for their behaviour, and so are in less danger of breaking moral proprieties in a manner which can be said to be their own responsibility. Also, so much of the stage action of these plays is carried out without the need or desire to conceal. The openness with which characters declare self-interest, or commit immoral acts, prevents there being any real comic tension. Witness, for

example, the scene of non-farce which has so much farcical potential in The Pleasure Principle, where two characters have what might perfunctorily be called illicit sex, as two different people break into their apartment without attempting to disguise the illegality of their behaviour (pp.51-56). Occasionally, however, farce is used, but in a most peculiar and subversive manner. The expediencies of plot force Brenton, in Measure for Measure, to deal with a scene of farce, but Shakespeare's switcheroo is dealt with by Brenton by an open and skilled usage of boulevard farce. Brenton deftly turns up the heat on his characters with a series of minor disasters, such as the arrival of Abhorson blind drunk in the bedroom assigned for the liaison between Angelo and Isabella, and Mrs. Overdone, the too early arrival of the Duke, the inability of Isabella to switch off the lights, at the crucial interchange between herself and Mistress Overdone, and finally the blowing of an infra-red bulb, which will prevent the filming of the liaison, which leads to a scene of high farce on the bed, where Angelo is grabbing for Mistress Overdone, and Jerky Joe stands between them, trying to change the bulb. (pp.146-161). But the effect of all this is instantly undermined - Angelo has been informed of the deception ahead - he is not at all caught out by the Duke's surprise entrance. Far from being compromised, he immediately brings in policemen to arrest those involved in the film, and reminds them all of what he has already stated, that his media-created image of purity is unassailable and that their efforts at blackmail are to no avail. The effect is like that achieved at the "horror movie" first appearance of Christie in Christie in Love - we are led down the garden path of a highly enjoyable popular form which promises no moral repercussions,

then suddenly confronted with an ugly, mundane reality which inverts our initial expectations of light enjoyment. Similarly in The Bewitched, the scene of bedroom farce, where the number of concealed bodies in Ana's bedchamber accumulate behind curtains, in trunks, in wardrobes, under the bed and in the bed, culminating finally in the King himself concealing his position along with his subjects, as Mariana arrives. Yet all the paraphernalia of farce is rendered pointless by this final concealment, since Mariana knows that Carlos is in the bedchamber and begins to simply address him as if he were not concealed (pp.248-51). This brings out the fact that the King, like Angelo in the last scene, is too powerful to be compromised, so the farce is rendered peculiarly redundant, and the audience is left, quite deliberately, without the conventional pay-off that they have been led to expect. The only notable scene of "real" farce which occurs amongst this group of plays is the violent climax of the first act of Vampire, but even this simply indicates the impossibility of farce in the contemporary period, since by setting this farcical scene in mid Victorian England, Wilson counterpoints it with the contemporary act, where the elaborate concealments, fake spiritualism and sense of outrage to sexual and social proprieties cannot exist.

All this in itself constitutes something of a rejection of the forms which had been employed to attack the consensus politicians of 1964 to 1968, but this attack upon earlier forms is made quite direct and explicit in several of the plays with which we are concerned. By making his central character a drama critic, Mercer is able to put into the mouth of Bernard many of his own gripes about the theatre, including having him complain

of "A third-rate misfiring farce, written by an unconscious reactionary who thinks he's a combination of Strindberg and Lenin" (p.28). A sense of a rejection of recent theatrical experiments also creeps in, in Mercer's neat burlesquing of that other sacred cow of the sixties, Julien Beck's *Living Theatre* (pp.52-54). Saunders is also keen on a theatrical experiment which will set his play apart from what has gone before. In contrast to farce, where much of the humour derives from the characters' lack of knowledge of what the audience can plainly see, where the absolute earnestness of the characters, one to another, must not be disrupted by any tipping of winks, of acknowledging of audience as subtext, Saunders' play eschews completely the idea of subtext. "If anyone wants to get beneath the surface", says Saunders, "let them find another play"¹⁰⁴, and adds that the "superficiality" of technique, the idea of the performers being shabby actors in a play which reflects a shabby world is all important: "The methods of doing this will vary from bravura overacting, through flat throwing away of lines as meaningless slabs of dialogue, to an ironic delivery to the audience of lines ostensibly directed at other characters."¹⁰⁵ This overt acknowledgement of the play as theatre throughout (as opposed to the occasional "shock tactic" of a moment of theatrical self recognition, as exemplified by Orton) is something which is picked up by many of the playwrights of this group. The massive theatricality, incorporating melodrama, songs, parody domestic drama, dancing and so forth, of Wilson and Barnes is illustrative of this new found desire of theatre to recognise itself at all times as theatre, but perhaps the most telling examples are in the works of Cregan and Livings, for both of these writers had produced works of the former

period employing the earlier techniques. For the characters of say, Three Men for Colverton to break into song would have been inconceivable, yet in The Land of The Palms, many of the play's strongest moments occur through dialogue which is sung. Similarly, for Livings to have used the aside as, not just an expedient of plot, but also a device through which much of the emotional power of the play is expressed, would have seemed incredible to an audience of Eh?, yet in Honour and Offer the device of the aside is used in precisely this manner.

FOOTNOTES

1. Ernle Money, Margaret Thatcher: First Lady of The House (London, 1975)
2. Ibid. p.99.
3. Ibid. p.100.
4. Ibid. p.93.
5. Ibid. p.121.
6. Ibid. p.26.
7. J. Enoch Powell, Freedom and Reality (London, 1969), pp.281-290.
8. Ibid. p.285.
9. Ibid. p.283.
10. Ibid. pp.286-88.
11. Paul Foot, The Rise of Enoch Powell (London, 1969) Foot gives an account of an extended search for this old lady, who finally proved to be a fiction. Powell admitted later that he had made no attempt to verify her existence, but had taken at face value as true the letter which he had received which provided him with the story (pp.114-117).
12. Humphrey Berkeley, The Odyssey of Enoch: A Political Memoir (London, 1977) pp.78-79.
13. D. Spearman, "Enoch Powell's Postbag", New Society, 9 May, 1968.
14. Crossman, op.cit. Vol.III, p.22.
15. Ibid. p.29.
16. "Mass Market Powell", New Society, 25 April, 1968.
17. Z. Layton-Henry and P. Rich, Race, Government and Politics in Britain (London, 1986), pp.53-58.
18. "Forgive Their Trespasses?", New Society, 5 Feb, 1970, p.208.
19. A. Roth, op.cit. p.16.
20. Berkeley, op.cit. p.83.
21. D. Butler and M. Pinto-Duschinsky, The British General Election of 1970 (London, 1971), pp.405-8.
22. "Who Leads the Tories? Heath? Powell?", New Statesman, 5 June, 1970.
23. "Roy Jenkins and Enoch Powell Argue about the Politics of the Seventies", The Listener, 19 July, 1973.
24. "Enough of Enoch", New Statesman, 1 Sep. 1972.

25. A. King, "The Changing Tories", New Society, 2 May, 1968.
26. D. Marquand, "Tory Idealists", New Society, 9 April, 1970.
27. Ibid.
28. M. Laing, op.cit. p.239.
29. T. Patterson, "£36 a week. Can Any Family Live on Less?", Daily Express, 9 Sept. 1971.
30. S. Moore, "People Do Live on Sausages: Here's Proof Mr. Prior", Daily Mirror, 4 Oct. 1971.
31. "Opinion", Daily Express, 15 Sept. 1971.
32. C. Page, "Bulldogs Every Monday", The Guardian, 27 Jan. 1971. Quoted in R.H.S. Crossman (ed), The Bedside Guardian (London, 1971), pp.47-49.
33. "Don't Take Students for Granted", Daily Mirror, 14 May, 1973.
34. P. Cosgrove, "The Old Fox in Charge", Spectator, 21 Dec. 1974.
35. Laing, op.cit. pp.222-23.
36. Money, op.cit. pp.68-70.
37. Laing, op.cit. pp.190-91.
38. D. Hare, The History Plays (London, 1984), p.10.
39. James Saunders, Four Plays (Harmondsworth, 1971), pp.209-304.
40. J.C. Trewin (ed), Plays of the Year 37 (London, 1970), pp.109-192.
41. Ibid. Introduction, pp.8-9.
42. Such accusations were in the air at the time of the Kenyan Immigration Act of 1968, when the churches combined to condemn the act in the strongest possible terms, (Crossman, Diaries, op.cit. Vol.2, pp.688-89) and Callaghan details enormous difficulties with the passage of the Bill (James Callaghan, Time and Chance (London, 1987), pp.264-67).
43. Powell, op.cit. p.289.
44. Ibid. p.286-87.
45. Powell, op.cit. p.287.
46. A. Roth, Enoch Powell: Tory Tribune (London, 1970), p.361.
47. Ibid. Idem.
48. A. Durbard (ed), Playbill One (London, 1969), pp.73-106.
49. The date of first performance is not given in the text, but in The

Second Wave, J.R. Taylor (op.cit.) designates 1969 as the date of first production (p.168). Given that the book was produced for the purpose of immediate production this seems the likely date.

50. J. Speight, If There Weren't Any Blacks You'd Have to Invent Them (London, 1968)
51. Paul Foot, op.cit. p.129.
52. Powell, op.cit. pp.83-90.
53. H. Livings, Honour and Offer (London, 1969) The first performance of the play was, strangely, given in Cincinnati in November 1968, the first British production occurred in May 1969.
54. Peter Barnes, Collected Plays, (London, 1981) pp.121-153.
55. Gambit 17, 1971, pp.84-125.
56. David Halliwell, K.D. Dufford [...] (London, 1970)
57. M.J. Weimer, "Henry Livings", Wentworth ^{pp.} 305-311.
58. G. & B. Lloyd-Evans, op.cit. p.196.
59. Snoo Wilson, Pignight and Blowjob (London, 1975), pp.7-44.
60. There is some debate over this date - none is given in the text, but Ansorge puts it at 1969, while Styan cites 1970 as the first performance. I have opted for 1970, since the play is given in several sources as having been premiered at the Edinburgh Fringe of 1970.
61. Snoo Wilson, Vampire (London, 1979)
62. J.L. Styan, Modern Drama in Theory and Practice: Symbolism, Surrealism and the Absurd (Cambridge, 1981), p.178.
63. Introduction, Vampire, op.cit. p.10.
64. P. Ansorge, op.cit. p.16.
65. Powell, op.cit. p.290.
66. Ibid. p.282.
67. Ibid. p.313.
68. Ibid. p.283.
69. David Ian Rabey, British and Irish Political Drama in the Twentieth Century (London, 1986), pp.138-42.
70. M. Drandt, "Comic, Tragic or Absurd? On some parallels between the farces of Joe Orton and Seventeenth Century Tragedy", English Studies, 59, 1978, pp.202-17.
71. Snoo Wilson, The Pleasure Principle (London, 1974)
72. "Forgive Their Trespasses", op.cit.

73. Snoo Wilson, The Beast, (London, 1974)
74. Pignight and Blowjob, op.cit. pp.45-86.
75. David Mercer, After Haggerty, (London, 1970)
76. Itzin, op.cit. pp.94-101.
77. C. Chambers and M. Prior, Playwrights Progress: Patterns of Postwar British Drama, (Oxford, 1987) pp.40-44.
78. Itzin, op.cit. p.98.
79. David Cregan, The Land of The Palms and Other Plays, (London, 1973)
80. Howard Brenton, Three Plays, (Sheffield, 1989) pp.89-164.
81. Ibid. Introduction by J. Bull, p.12.
82. J. Bull, New British Political Dramatists, (London, 1984) p.44.
83. Howard Brenton, Magnificence, London, 1973.
84. R. Hayman, British Theatre Since 1955: A Reassessment, (Oxford, 1979) p.95.
85. Brenton played out the political ambiguity he felt with the remark "I do endorse the romantic element [in Jed]. I don't endorse what he did with it". P. Roberts, The Royal Court Theatre 1965-1972, (London, 1986), p.153.
86. Itzin, op.cit. pp.194-95.
87. Oleg Kerensky, The New British Drama: Fourteen Playwrights Since Osborne and Pinter, (New York, 1977), pp.214-16.
88. Howard Brenton, Plays: One, (London, 1986), pp.107-178.
89. Ibid. pp.179-254.
90. Bull, op.cit. p.49.
91. ^{David Hare,}
The History Plays, op.cit. pp.17-88.
92. Peter Ansorge, "David Hare: A War on Two Fronts", Plays and Players, April, 1978.
93. G. & B. Lloyd-Evans, op.cit. pp.197-98.
94. H. Brenton and D. Hare, Brassneck, (London, 1974)
95. D. Edgar, The Second Time as Farce: Reflections on the Drama of Mean Times, (London, 1988), p.43.
96. Charles Wood, Fill The Stage With Happy Hours, M. Jones (ed), New English Dramatists II, (Harmondsworth, 1967)
97. The most immediate source of information of the Profumo Affair would be M. Tomkinson and M. Gillard, Nothing To Declare: The Political

Corruptions of John Poulson (London, 1980) Further references are cited in my bibliography.

98. D. Sherwin, O Lucky Man, (1973), Telecast summer 1991, Channel 4.
99. Barnes, Collected Plays, op.cit. pp.183-341.
100. Another unique aspect of the play is that, it has, as an introduction (Ibid. pp.185-89), an essay from Ronald Bryden which recognises the importance of the theme of the meritocracy in the play, and in Barnes' work generally.
101. J. Lahr (ed), The Orton Diaries (London, 1986), p.205.
102. J.M. Davis, Farce (London, 1978), p.99.
103. J. Orton, Complete Plays (London, 1976), pp.29-62.
104. Saunders, op.cit. Introduction, p.214.
105. Ibid. Idem.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE MYTH OF THE MERITOCRACY

"Some children of an ability which should have qualified them as assistant secretaries were forced to leave school at fifteen and become postmen. Assistant secretaries delivering letters! - It is almost incredible. Other children with poor ability but rich connexions, pressed through Eton and Balliol, eventually found themselves in mature years as high officers in the Foreign Service. Postmen delivering *démarches*! - what a tragic farce!"

Michael Young, The Rise of the Meritocracy
1870-2033 (Harmondsworth, 1958)

It is difficult to comprehend, from our historical distance, the level of excitement which the promise of a newer, more meritocratic society created around the time of Wilson's ascent to premiership.¹ There are still many ideological survivors among the opposition parties of today, who cling vainly to the notion that class is no longer relevant as a determining factor in society, long after the calamitous political and economic upheavals of our period had exposed the glaring deficiencies of the Wilson/Heath myth of consensus meritocracy. The role model of this new, professional, careerist political image was Harold Wilson. Wilson insisted that a classless image be imposed upon him. In a television interview broadcast in February, 1964, he remarked, in answer to the question "Are you our prototype for the sixties and the seventies, the efficient man, the classless man?", that he regarded himself as classless, since he was of a working class (this point is in fact, at best, moot) background, and had worked his way through Grammar School to become an Oxford don, and added:

In the advanced technological age many of those who were called workers are becoming highly skilled technicians, people mastering techniques of science, mathematics that would have made a Senior Wrangler blanch fifty years ago. I don't think we can really talk so much in those terms.^{1a}

From the outset, the new Labour leader took good account of the markedly more equable level of social mobility in the early sixties to promote his as a young person's party for a different social order. In the aftermath of the 1966 General Election, Shirley Williams, in an article remarkable for its adoration of

Wilson, confidently predicted that "another decade or so may spell the end of class politics in Britain, among younger voters at least"², and pointed proudly to the flocks of new converts from the "junior professional and executive occupations, men and women often hit with high taxes and concerned with incentives". These days one word, of course, can encapsulate such a belaboured description, something which points to the relative newness of the concept at this time.

That this role model of the classless technocrat was very much the political word of the day is illustrated by the haste of the Conservative party in bringing forward Edward Heath, who was hailed, in the week of his appointment as leader, as a man whose "kinship [is] with the unprivileged meritocracy".³ But Wilson was the innovator of this political fad, and almost immediately, the initiator of its disillusion. When Wilson appointed his new cabinet after the defeat of the allegedly outmoded aristocrats of the previous government, it went not without remark that the "new men" of his cabinet had a considerably greater average age than the men of the Tory shadow cabinet. Ministers such as Jim Griffiths, Frank Soskice, Arthur Bottomley, Fred Lee and Lord Longford brought the average age of the new cabinet to 57. There was more than a whiff of "buggins turn" rather than meritocracy about this body, indeed the new Prime Minister was himself, aside from one member of the cabinet (Dennis Healey), the youngest man among them.⁴ Wilson quickly became aware of the embarrassment that the new cabinet caused, particularly by comparison with Home's much younger cabinet, now rejoined by the "young Turks", Iain Macleod and Enoch Powell, and already containing such young and prominent faces as Heath, Maudling, Joseph and Boyle. With the ditching of Butler

at the first available opportunity, as well as the older Macmillanites, such as Lord Blackenham (replaced by Edward Du Cann, who at 40, was thought by Home "the right sort of age" for the job of party chairman)⁵ and Martyn Redmayne, and the promotion of "meritocrats" to senior positions, Home's shadow cabinet contained eight members under the age of fifty, while the cabinet contained only two. In order to counter the charge that his new technocracy was staffed by old duffers, Wilson characteristically chose to reshuffle, and while the government was yet young, brought in ministers intended to convey an image of youth and vitality.

Most prominent among these was Anthony Wedgewood Benn, Shirley Williams, Anthony Crossland and Roy Jenkins. It had perhaps not occurred to Wilson that all four of these ministers were from backgrounds of privilege, and that the first three young meritocrats mentioned were from upper-class, public school backgrounds of precisely the type that he had been attacking as holders of high office under the previous government. The political atmosphere created is described by Bernard Levin in his assessment of the Tony Benn of 1965/1966:

Over much of it [the technological expansion of the mid-sixties] there loomed the figure of Anthony Wedgewood Benn, ministering priest (or maintenance engineer) to the great god Technology, whose worship, by the time the sixties ended, had for many (especially Benn) become the State Religion in succession to an effete and despairing Church of England [...] Benn, one of the most inexorably characteristic figures of the decade, was a prognethous teetotaller who all too predictably

became Minister of Technology in Mr. Wilson's government, after an interlude in which the post had been held by Frank Cousins - the nation's leading Luddite - though not for very long. Benn flung himself into the sixties technology with the enthusiasm (not to say language) of a newly enrolled Boy Scout demonstrating knot-tying to his indulgent parents. Presently the entire land echoed to his pronouncements, and many shuddered at his vision of a hygienic, remote-controlled, automated future, the shudders becoming more pronounced as the technology with which the public already came in contact showed more and more signs, as the decade moved towards its end, of total breakdown [...]. This state of affairs did not, however, prevent Benn from painting, in ever more exciting colours, his dream of the future, though the more he sprinkled his language with "jolly goods" the more his vision was belied by the actuality.⁶

Contemporary commentators as reliable as Sampson would broaden out this criticism to the entire Labour Cabinet, amongst whom, it was complained, there was a predominance of Oxbridge (particularly Oxford) dons, so that the Old Etonian jargon of the Tories was supplanted by an equally infuriating "high table language".⁷

In the early years of our period this paradox was not lost upon those who had supported the overthrow of Home's Old Etonians. Amongst the critics of the new government were a number of the writers with whom we are concerned. In David Pinner's Fanghorn, we are presented with a protagonist whose

meritocratic rise to the top of the Ministry of Defence is continually undercut. Joseph King seems to be implicitly compared to the original young Labour meritocrat, Dennis Healey, not only in his Ministry, but also in his avowed anti-communism (p.17), something for which Healey was also particularly noted.⁸ The first sight with which an audience is greeted in the play is the set, representing a home of exceptional opulence in this new and more equal society (p.7), but the more pointed joke about Joseph's rise to influence and power is the running gag about his public school background which undermines his modern, technocratic status. Very early on, the enigmatic and threatening Tamara Fanghorn phones Joseph, and the first of a succession of comical, but increasingly vicious assaults upon his character climaxes when he is forced to admit that he is, in fact, a Wykamist (p.9). A sense of paranoia in the protagonist is increased by his daughter's allusion to the practical inadequacy of his Winchester education (p.18). All this has occurred before the introduction of Tamara, whose aggression towards Joseph when she arrives is supported by a knowledge of his life more intimate than that of Joseph's second wife, Janey, or her daughter by his first marriage, Jackie. Joseph moves rapidly towards breakdown as Tamara exposes the privileges of wealthy parentage, prep school and Winchester of which Joseph has previously made light (pp.45-46), and at the curtain of act two he undergoes an emasculation which proves, after the audiences' bracing whiskies, to be purely symbolic - Tamara, with the collaboration of Jackie and Janey, has deprived Joseph not of his manhood, but his moustache (pp.56-59) although Pinner has gone to significant lengths to establish this as his "pride and

joy". The object of all this factual revelation would appear to be to induce in Joseph a bout of psychological self-revelation, and when this finally comes, his broken ravings appear to be a perverse mixture of technocratic professional jargon and archaic High Tory banter which acts to invert our initial expectations of the character, and the premises of his meritocratic image:

...something the Chinese will never understand, is that their growing professionalism, their socialistic discipline and organisation can never overpower the Englishman's irreparable amateur status! Even death is amusing to a good honest clean-living Englishman. I've always found it so. In my experiments, that is.

TAMARA: Murder, I understand, has its comic potential. (p.70)

Indeed it does, but the potentiality is better exploited by David Mercer in Belcher's Luck, where the murderous Helen has an aristocratic background to contrast with her Wilsonian ethic, and is indeed planning to restore her uncle's estate, once he is disposed of, to its former glory. Even Victor is shocked:

VICTOR: [...] People like you aren't supposed to have that kind of ambition nowadays. It's very naughty. Your lot are supposed to be manipulating money and power in the background - hands across the meritocracy and all that. You're not supposed to go sneaking about plotting to restore Adam ceilings and put back the old peacocks. You're supposed to be playing all that down. The

country's not only got to be conned - it's got to
be ^{not} seen to be conned. (p.74)

Helen's ideological identity is exposed by the exchange with Belcher in which the murder of Catesby is first proposed. The rhetoric of a newer and more equal society is revealed to be a pragmatic affair. In order to maintain its ascendancy, the ruling class determines to change its appearance:

HELEN: I believe in partnership, Belcher.

BELCHER: Partnership?

HELEN: Between those who work and those who own.

You might have heard of the idea. It isn't madly original. (pause) Our family has had this estate for three hundred years. They were prosperous. But now just look around you. It's the end of all that. He's the last, and he's opted out. He knows how the world has changed...must change...but he'll not have it here. (p.59)

The sense of a merely cosmetic change in the social structure of Wilson's Britain is also conveyed in The Lunatic, The Secret Sportsman and the Woman Next Door (1968)⁹, where Stanley Eveling returns to the image of the public school as a key metaphor. Significantly, the Secret Sportsman of the title is named Ted (p.23), and his parallel with Heath, the man who was designated the job of being as much like Wilson as possible at this time¹⁰, does not end here. He, too is full of the shibboleths of the end of class politics school of thought. Like Helen, Teddy believes in tearing down the old class barriers with initiative and enterprise:

ELSIE: How's business?

SPORTSMAN: Pretty brisk. Two mergers, a take-over

and a fly-over. We're showing an absolute profit of two thousand per cent, and the workers aren't suffering either. Our interests are identical. (p.15)

Yet he is not the "new man" of his promise, for once again the meritocrat protagonist proves to be obsessed with his public school background (p.23) and as the first act progresses, it becomes increasingly clear that, far from being a "liberal" businessman, Ted is in fact a much older figure:

SPORTSMAN: [...] I'm a Rotarian.

DORIS: Oh, I've heard of that. You must be very important.

SPORTSMAN: That's nothing. Play along with me, baby, and you'll be alright. I'm a freemason, a Wykamist, a member of the Free Council of Churches; I also believe in Moral Rearmament, or we're finished. I've got shares in the Lord's Day Observance Society and I'm one of the few people to have actually signed the Potsdam agreement.

(pp.21-22)

Further, his newer traits prove to be more in line with those of the hard right of Powell than Heath's Wilsonism with an inhuman face:

SPORTSMAN: We were against Hitler, of course, but whose to say he wasn't right after all. He was a bulwark against Communism and I notice quite a few people are taking the Hitler line nowadays but they don't give him the credit. (p.24)

As the Sportsman's latent homosexuality begins to dominate his actions, he is forced into a succession of self revelations, and finally dresses Elsie up like a public school boy, whilst he

himself dons an immaculate pinstripe suit, complete with bowler and brolly (p.50) in order to fulfil his desires. Finally, the Sportsman, like Joseph in Fanghorn, is denuded of his most prized possession, in this case his wig, and is forced at the climax to suffer the laughter of Elsie in a scene of high farce which reveals him to be an old duffer, rather than a man of the future, a curtain which stresses the self-revelation, rather than self-awareness of black comic comeuppance (pp.64-65).

As a result of the political rhetoric of the early to mid-sixties, great prominence was given by the media to a particular middle-class managerial figure as role model. The coolly manipulative, scrupulously contemporary, apparently classless figure of the "man manager" became very much a character of the sixties. The earliest real analysis of these new people of the sixties came in Raymond Williams' uniquely perspicacious essay on Britain at this time at the end of his The Long Revolution:¹¹

There are still many natural autocrats in our society, and the trouble they cause is beyond reckoning. More dangerous, perhaps, because less easily identified, are these skilled in what was called in the army "man management". The point here, as I remember, is that of course you have to command, but since a leader has to be followed he must be diligently attentive to the state of mind of those he is leading: must try to understand them, talk to them about their

problems (not about his own, by the way), get a picture of their state of mind. Then, having taken these soundings, having really got the feel of his people, he will point the way forward. I know of few greater pleasures, in contemporary Britain, than that of watching man management, for indeed its practitioners are almost everywhere. It is true that they are usually very bad at it, although they invariably think themselves very good. The calmly appraising eyes (narrowed about an eighth of an inch, more would look suspicious), the gentle silences, the engaging process of drawing the man out: although I have watched these often, I find them better than most plays. And these are the heroes of our public life, with a solid weight of mutual admiration behind them. An exceptionally large part of what passes for political commentary is now a public discussion of a party leader's command of this skill: How will the Prime Minister or the Leader of the Opposition 'handle' this or that 'awkward element'; how will he time his intervention; if he says this, how can he avoid saying that? The really funny thing about this kind of commentary is that it is public; printed and distributed in millions of sheets; read by almost everybody, including the 'awkward elements'. The delicate art has become public myth, and it is rare to see it challenged. This, evidently is what democratic leadership is supposed to be.

This managerial generation were committed to the concepts (to use a keyword of the current generation of such figures) of public relations, of modernisation and, as already stated, technological growth. They claimed to have no truck with the older institutions of state and attributed to themselves great flexibility in realising the common interests of workers and management. The kind of flexibility required for this in fact rather stilted and dogmatic generation of "man managers" is illustrated by yet another description of a relevant cabinet minister, this time, significantly (for females were appearing in management in unprecedented numbers) a woman - Mrs. Shirley Williams. In R.W. Johnson's essay, she is compared to Margaret Thatcher by a prominent civil servant who served under both at the Department of Education. Thatcher would

...sit behind her desk and harangue me. I'd only get the odd word in and I'd come out totally depressed at the thought that I hadn't changed her mind on one single point. Shirley, on the other hand, always listened most sympathetically. Head to one side, understanding shining from her eyes [...] But here's the odd thing. At the end of the day Thatcher might actually have changed her position. Shirley, the great listener, would not have moved one inch.¹²

The cool and manipulative figure of a woman in management is one which recurs again and again in plays of the mid sixties. What might be called the Mrs. Vealfoy syndrome is quite instructive of the way in which managerial figures in general were perceived by humourists of the period. In his important and memorable (because, at least in part, of its historical

specificity) book Corporation Man¹³, Anthony Jay details the importance of these new women amongst the tribal figures of corporation management groups, and their prominence as figures of conciliation and quelling of aggression.¹⁴ The book, which had as its germination the specific date of April 9th, 1964, details many of the character traits of the new corporation manager, with particular emphasis upon the aggressive and latently territorial nature of the institutional executive figure. A slightly later example of the same kind of study, Cleverley's Managers and Magic¹⁵, details the ritual and taboo significances inherent in the management techniques of such figures, and specifically points to the taboo significances of women in corporation structures.¹⁶ Both books are examples of the widely held belief that non-rational religious elements motivated the modern business world far more than its technocratic rhetoric would have allowed.

A shining example of the female managerial figure in black comedy of the period is the inappropriately named Mrs. Mercy Croft in Frank ^{Marcus'} ~~Mercer's~~ The Killing of Sister George (1965)¹⁷, the black and cynical outlook of which is (as with Mrs. Mouse, are You Within in 1968) diminished by an ending fraught with pathos, suggesting a "sensitive", rather than a political issue. Nevertheless, there is more than a suggestion of Orton about the play as a whole, particularly in the hypocritical figure of Mrs. Mercy, the "compassionate" star of "Ask Mrs. Mercy" on the BBC women's hour (p.8), and a managerial executive from Broadcasting House, a model of the sanitised humanity dispensed by the great institutions of the welfare state. Mrs. Mercy is full of the cant of her kind, and is astutely observed by Marcus:

She is a well-groomed lady of indeterminate age, gracious of manner and freezingly polite. She is wearing a navy blue two-piece suit, matching hat and accessories, and a discreet double string of pearls round her neck. She carries a brief case. (p.11)

She is in fact a closet lesbian, who attacks the homosexual relationship of June (Sister George of the long-running BBC radio soap opera, "Applehurst") and her friend Alice. Practicality, one of Mercy's keywords (p.19), is extended to her sexuality, since, as Wandor points out¹⁸, she is able to exorcise taboo breakers, yet retain her own sexual identity. Mercy's supposed status as a new woman is, however, undermined from the start. She intercedes against George on behalf of the BBC, one of the great monolithic institutions of state (it is a striking theatrical image in itself, since Broadcasting House literally overlooks the flat of June and Alice - p.12)¹⁹ over a charge levelled against June by the Church, one of the ancient, conservative institutions of state. Apparently, June has become drunk and attempted to assault two nuns in a taxi. June, farcically compromised by the situation, produces a fine verbal set piece as a desperate explanation:

JUNE [...] I'd had a few pints - I saw this cab, got in - and there were these two black things - screaming blue murder.

MERCY: Why didn't you get out?

JUNE: Well, I'd a very nasty shock myself. What with their screaming and flapping about - I thought they were bats, vampire bats. It was they who attacked me. I remember getting all entangled in their skirts and petticoats and things - the

taxi driver had to pull me free.

MERCY: A deplorable anecdote (*She refers to the paper*)

According to the mother superior, one of the nuns required medical treatment for shock, and is still under sedation (*She pauses*) She thought it was the devil. (p.18)

Mrs. Mercy's visit is in fact an expression of old political forms, using the new "flexible" ethic as their vehicle. This is clear from the outset, as the incident which initiates the "killing" of "George" is introduced:

MERCY: We learn from experience. But we don't want *Applehurst* falling behind the times.

JUNE: No. (*She looks away. Worried*).

No, of course not.

MERCY: But we must constantly examine criticism, and if it's constructive, we must act on it.

Ruthlessly. (p.16)

What is immediately evident in The Killing of Sister George is that Marcus uses a contemporary phenomenon, the decline of the British radio serial, as an analogy for the change in the social structure which took place in Britain in the sixties, which claimed so many victims for so little tangible result. I have never, to my knowledge, heard an episode of The Dales, the British Radio soap opera which ran from 1948 until 1969, but the changes which, by Levin's account²⁰ overtook the series after its name was shortened from Mrs.Dales' Diary in 1962, seem to mirror those in Applehurst. The Dale family of the series were made, after the change, to leave the comfortable, leafy outer London suburb of its setting

for an industrial new town, and issues such as racism, homosexuality, the economic crisis, were suddenly introduced into the storyline, replacing what Levin calls the "relentless trivia" of previous plots, which never became more serious than minor domestic quarrels. This very phenomenon appears to be about to subsume Applehurst, and as with The Dales, the principal character is to be "killed off" - George will be run down by a ten ton truck during Road Safety Week (pp.42-43). A new "anti-hero" will become the star of Applehurst: "JUNE: An anti-hero in Applehurst?/MERCY: Contemporary appeal, Sister George. Applehurst is facing up to the fact that the old values have become outdated" (p.60). Mercy then announces the "slaughter", as June puts it, of a succession of the older characters, and the replacement of the Sister George character with a young probationer, Sister Larry:

JUNE: Sister Larry! You're going to make this ill-bred, uneducated little slut....

MERCY: (*Moving RC, shouting*) Contemporary appeal, Sister George. People like that do exist - and in positions of power and influence: Flawed, credible characters like Ginger, Nurse Lawrence, Rosie...

JUNE: (*Squaring up to Mercy*) What about Rosie?

MERCY: She's pregnant.

JUNE: I know that. And she's not married either, that's about as flawed and credible as you can get.

MERCY: She's going to marry her boyfriend - Lennie.

JUNE: Oh good. Good. (*She moves to the armchair*

B) I'm glad. I'm glad about that - glad

(she sits)

(There is a pause)

MERCY: *(sitting on sofa)* Mind you, it's not his baby. (p.61)

June stoically defends the values of her fictional world, values which are denied to her by her sexuality in the real world, whilst the conservative Mercy attacks a fictional representation of her own values.

De Vitis calls The Killing of Sister George "a black comedy on the theme of illusion and reality"²¹, and is not incorrect, but the play is more enjoyable for some of its component parts than the effect of the whole. The central theme appears to be the demolition of June Buckeridge by the agent of a massive institution which has changed her identity to that of Sister George of Applehurst. June lives the part of her fictionalised self, and as Wandor points out²², her final destruction is achieved through Mercy's "killing" of George, an obliteration of identity. The process of naming is absolutely central to the play. Mercy refuses to call June anything but George, even after announcing her demise, and June is frequently called upon to adopt the manner of a country nurse, even in the scene of her "funeral", where she begins by insisting that she be referred to as June (p.55), although Mercy, Alice and Xenia continue to call her George. She is finally placed in a position where she is bound, once again, to become Sister George (pp.60-63). Because of the imposed liquidity of June's identity, her fight with the technocrat from the BBC is fated to its final image, that of the curtain falling upon June as she assumes the demeaning role of Clarabelle Cow, a final malicious gesture from Mercy, who has stolen the lover of her protagonist.

June's conflict with the modern technocracy is one fraught with irony. Just as her insistence upon her real, rather than her imposed identity stands in ironic contrast with Mercy's insistence upon the George character, in spite of her belief that "It is the policy of the BBC to face up to reality" (p.61), so the bluntness of June's language represents a challenge to the euphemistic obfuscations of Mercy. June is appalled by Mercy's use of such terms as "the little girls room" (p.16), but her own usages are frequently seen to prefigure her downfall. Her eventual loss of Alice is foreshadowed by the loss of her stag's head (itself a frank emblem of June's taboo-breaking propensities), an object which Alice seems to feel is in bad taste, and whose possible recovery sparks a row which delineates the problem of adjustment to outside society as one of language: "ALICE: I'll phone up the Town Hall - the Borough Litter Disposal Unit.../JUNE: (tragically) You mean the dustman don't you? Why can't you bloody well say so?" (p.10).

The play, then, treats us to the spectacle of a non-conformist individual being destroyed by an archaic institution, disguised as a benevolent representative of the new lifestyle. This central conflict is explored by a subtext of juxtapositional language and by a clash of real and fictional identities. There is also the usual conflict of private vice and public virtue. But most of all, there is depicted a war between a rationalistic outlook, that of the stable, scientific meritocrat, and a world view which brings to bear all manner of occulted and mythic gesture upon the problems of survival. But more of this later.

In Henry Livings' Eh? (1964)²³, we are also presented with a fully fledged version of the Mrs. Vealfoy syndrome in the

character of Mrs. Murray, the personnel officer of a large factory, of significantly unspecified industrial function. It is against this figure, with her marshalled forces of Price, an aggressive Tory foreman and Reverend Mort, a local vicar of the newer kind, very similar to Father Pym of Three Men for Colverton, that Val Brose, a nonconformist dogsbody with a whimsical, evasive personality (if that is what we may call it) attempts to establish an identity entirely at variance with the fashion of welfare state greyness, within a company which epitomises this lifestyle.

Livings, in his *dramatis personae*, provides a description of Mrs. Murray which is immediately familiar to the informed reader of the period: "MRS. MURRAY: a handsome and mature woman, even pretty. Professional and crisp in manner usually, she can be warm, but tends to use her femininity" (p.6). The industrial conflict of Eh? is played out on a set which is again characteristic, although as a theatrical metaphor, it is perhaps the most extreme among plays of this group. Whereas The Killing of Sister George takes place in a private flat, albeit one which is dwarfed by Broadcasting House, and The Good and Faithful Servant contains ten scenes in the workplace and nine in the home of Edith and Buchanan (a home which is filled with furniture and consumer goods from the workplace), the single set of Eh? is the boiler room of a factory, one in which the cast is dwarfed by the massive, kafkaesque presence of a wall of gauges and dials, which overwhelm the one human gesture of "a spartan two-tiered bunk" and a steel locker (p.7). But this is not the old blue collar, pre-technology factory of Post War Britain - the initial interaction between the apparently passive Val and the representatives of a bogus humanity which is inherently

right-wing, is instructive of the nature of the conflict to come: "PRICE: [...] It will be your business to supervise this boiler, in which you will find no shred of effort is required: there's no labour in this work, only productivity: not busyness, business" (p.12). But once again, the business of the employers is not so much portrayed as one of sharing the benefits of affluence with one's workers, as trading off new, technocratic frameworks for an older, more familiar workplace regime. Val is provided with a contract:

MRS. MURRAY: (takes one out of folder): You'd better take it away and read it.

PRICE: Then sign it.

MRS. MURRAY: Just that you understand the general conditions of employment.

PRICE: And an undertaking that you won't join a union.

MRS. MURRAY: All that sort of negotiation is looked after by our Joint Conciliation Committee, for which you are entitled to vote, or to stand if you wish. (p.14)

As with The Killing of Sister George, the firm's ultimate power source is its capacity to dictate the identity of any individual within its sphere of influence. Val's relative success in combatting the firm comes from the nebulousness and liquidity of his background. It is difficult for Price and Mrs. Murray to provide a niche for Val, as no-one can testify to any real knowledge of him - he is a mystery, and the labour exchange, his school and all other sources can produce little evidence of his existence (p.30). Questions of identity are raised by the text, the homespun and painstakingly commonplace style of which

sets off the nature of the farce beautifully:

BETTY: (to the others) Who's he?

PRICE: Me, I'm me, Price, that's who I am.

BETTY: Oh yes, it's alright saying that, but where are you when you've said it? (p.34)

The self possession (literally) of each of the firm's antagonistic employees is shaken in just this way, and their ability to secure even as much as a physical description of Val by his fiancée is of no assistance, since it is singularly inappropriate:"BETTY: He's sort of dashing looking with rather fine eyes and a rusky tusky oak flavoured voice. (Pause) MRS. MURRAY: Well...that *describes* him. MORT: I suppose it does. MRS. MURRAY: It's definitely a description as such. MORT: The eyes of love, Mrs. Murray" (p.36). Reverend Mort's attempts to "technologise" Val with an industrial "identity" through ersatz spirituality also fail, meeting the usual wall of vagueness:

VAL: I feel lonely.

MORT: Faith^{can} give us back our identity.

VAL: Yes, I think you're right. Can you read those dials?

[Val now sidetracks Mort into filling out his (Val's) clipboard]

[...] VAL: Yes, identity, you've hit it.

MORT: (More interested in the card) Mm? You know industry, when you size it up, comes down to a very simple set of figures.

VAL: These cards are good. Had one with my picture on in the army. MPs were always interested. Who am I if there's nobody here? Backs toward the door

MORT: Prayer, in which we strain to merge ourselves

with the Almighty Will, strangely confirms our individual worth.

VAL: (at the door) I think I have serious withdrawal symptoms. (p.55)

For all the evasiveness, there is in fact no doubt in Val's mind that, as he puts it, he is who he is (p.54), so any form of institutional ritual simply bounces off that certainty, since no certainties can be imposed upon him. Of his wedding, Betty claims that it was as though he had not been present, to which Val replies "I did feel a bit disembodied, ^{didn't you?} Not that you looked disembodied; you looked more like bodied" (p.41).

One by one, by a largely passive form of subversion (although at one point he is found to have been printing "leaflets against the boss class and their lackeys" - p.38) Val manages to reduce his superiors in the firm to despair. Climactically there is a revealing scene, in which Mrs. Murray, the white-overalled chief conciliator of the first act, urges Reverend Mort to punch Val to the ground. This act of brutality, and more, is carried out by Mort and Price, to their mutual satisfaction (pp.66-69). This open admission of the latent violence of the benevolent industrial technocracy very quickly diminishes its authority, and one by one Mort, Price and finally Mrs. Murray lose their grip, and seem to be afflicted with the delusions which Val may only appear to be manifesting. Mort and Price are left quite literally eating out of Val's hand, and having become stoned on his magic mushrooms, they wander off arm in arm singing snatches of undergraduate rugby songs, and making random observations of their environment. Mrs. Murray is embarrassed out of the action by Val's subversion of an area of her character which had formerly been used as a tool of

domination, her sexuality. Val claims to be able to see through her clothes, and convinced that he can do so, she edges off sideways "covering her modesty" (pp.72-74).

But the end would not be that of its genre if the underdog were allowed to win the day. Rather than allow an implausible victory of the outsider against the established moral order, Livings completes the piece with an apocalyptic explosion, as the boiler, so sorely mistreated throughout, finally engulfs the entire set in a "prolonged and reverberating boom" and Val and Aly, the two surviving victims, are swallowed up by "steam, smoke, soot and coal" while Val proclaims his destruction of both himself and the industrial symbol under which he has toiled with "There was a boiler. Once upon a time", the final words of the play (p.75).

A less subtly drawn character, but one of identical stamp to Mrs. Mercy and Mrs. Murray, is Agnes in James Saunders' A Scent of Flowers (1964).^{23a} Her personality is summarised in the single sentence with which Zoe introduces her: "Agnes is a woman without love. She reeks of understanding, but she hasn't any love" (p.21). The word "fact" recurs countlessly in Agnes' dialogue, (for example, pp.21-23, pp.36-37) as does the word "reality", but her attempts to come to terms with her ailing stepdaughter show that her rationalistic pragmatism is ultimately a bar to communication:

AGNES: I've always said it because it's always been true [that Zoe dislikes her] I try to face facts David, as I'm trying to make you face facts now. I don't blame her for not liking me, I blame her circumstances; I've tried all along to understand her and create sympathy between us, and I've

failed; this is a fact.

DAVID: Have you ever shown any love for her?

AGNES: I've done my best to understand her! (p.36)

Her practicality creates a scene of gallows humour in which she cannot comprehend her husband's appreciation of the funeral service on the grounds that its object is dead, an Ortonesque attitude which appears before Orton, and in a character of a type frequently lambasted by him (p.71). The play is an uncomely mix of Osborne's comedy of manners and Shaffer's conflicts of the rational psyche and impulses towards the absolute. Through it runs a thread of sick jokey exhibitionism which cannot be integrated into the many realistic set pieces of dialogue. As a result, such hilarious pieces as Uncle Edgar's monologue on death, coffins, God and existence (p.28), packed as it is with blasphemies which would, within a few years, become cliches, must be ended by his simply exiting without riposte in the middle of the scene. The satirical element seems to centre on the conflict between Agnes, on the one hand, and Uncle Edgar and Godfrey on the other, but this is somewhat incidental to the emotionally central scenes which pertain to the death of Zoe, who is seen to attend her own funeral, enacting all the while flashbacks to her demise. For our purposes, the play once again concentrates upon the emotional barrenⁿness of the new professional career woman, but its satiric impulse goes little further, with a broader discussion of the hypocrisy of the English middle classes picking out few specific targets.

The mother in Cregan's Transcending (1966)²⁴ is not quite the professional career woman exemplified by Mrs. Murray, since she would appear to be a housewife, or at least a woman who, for the purposes of the play, is concerned primarily with home life.

In all other respects, however, she is a caricature on the same lines. Once again, the character radiates a bogus concern which fails to impress the protagonist, in this case her daughter, whose failure to pass her A levels provides the farcical motivation for a crisis which affects all of the characters of the play except the girl it should most affect. During her mother's confrontation with her boyfriend, Simon, the girl comments of her mother's claim to special insight into human emotion "She can't help exploiting the situation. Simon doesn't go for situations. They ruin communication" (p.14). Likewise, mother's attempt to establish an affair with Mr. Lemster leads him to confess "I simply want a proper human relationship. That isn't possible with her because she's too dramatic" (p.29). Mother reckons herself to be artistic, but for all her descriptions of herself to Father to this effect, there is no evidence of this. Although claiming to be the opposite, she is, at bottom, a rationalist of the most inflexible variety, and at the moment when, for the first time, an impulse to act upon an overwhelming emotion overtakes Father, she is the first to protest: "MOTHER: Now be reasonable, darling. FATHER: Reasonable! (He laughs hollowly. To the audience) It's hard keeping everything in order. So long as my wife stays inflexible, I'll manage". (p.24).

As late as Eveling's Come and Be Killed (1967)²⁵ there appears the Mrs. Vealfoy syndrome in the form of Christine, the wife of Jim. A slightly more positive view of the career woman is presented at least in the sense that they, if they are not, within themselves, reassuring as a societal force, do at least affront the sensibilities of self-centred and egotistical sexists such as Jim and Jerry (p.60). But the creatures they

have become as a result of the rise of women such as Christine are unreassuringly described by Jim:

"Women suckers are the most contemporary of men...! Recognising that we have moved into a new age, the age of the Rampant, Rampaging or Amazonian female, each species to be found prowling from Bo'ness to Potter's Bar, from Bonn, Germany to Birmingham, Alabama, your woman sucker also recognises that it is the fate of all men, ultimately to be herded into compounds and kept for special occasions. To stave off this lugubrious and inevitable process they try to draw out, or off, the essence of women, suck them into themselves. Their motto is: "If you can't beat 'em, suck em." They're not homosexual, exactly, or exactly anything; They're more like parasites who assume the shape of the hostess upon whom they feed . (p.78)

But it is to the work of Orton that one must look for the quintessence of this particular satiric vein. In The Good and Faithful Servant (1967), he presents the ultimate comic grotesque of the Mrs. Murray/Mrs. Mercy kind (as well as one of the comic grotesques of the decade) in Mrs. Vealfoy. Around her, Orton builds a play quite unlike the others of his oeuvre. Its tone is bleaker than any of Orton's farces, and the play is, as Bigsby points out, a satire rather than a farce²⁶, since instead of merely targetting a number of themes of modern society for satiric attack, it sets up, in the figure of Ray, an alternative value structure, thereby exposing Orton as the traditional just man moved by outrage to an assault upon the

excesses about him. If the play is not exactly a social realist piece, it is closer to a direct social commentary upon the nature of work in the new Britain than anything else turned out by Orton. As with the other plays of this group, there are here two, quite tangible sets of values in conflict, and this conflict must end in the destruction of one faction, or (as with Eh?) both factions. Unlike Orton's other plays, there are no means by which more than one faction can gain its ends. This is, of course, what happens in What The Butler Saw, for example, where the affront is finally not to any of the characters, but to the established morality itself.

Once again we are presented, in the character of Mrs. Vealfoy, with a creature of the new age of Britain. The modernity of the plant which has ground Buchanan into the remnant that he has become, is emphasised, and the dawn of the new age is signified by the presence of the efficient declasse personnel manager, Mrs. Vealfoy, whose talk is very much of technology and rationalism. It is she who presents him with the retirement gift of two items of the recent consumer goods boom, an electric toaster and an electric clock. The clock is an obvious ironic symbol of Buchanan's wasted life, whilst the toaster, which Edith claims "shows how much they think of you" (p.165) explodes with a bang at his first attempts to use it, and proves, in the words of Ray, who examines the smoking wreck, to be a "load of old rubbish" (p.168). The malignant irony which traces Buchanan to his grave is particularly evident in his welcoming of the new technology which has contributed to his redundancy. In his retirement speech Buchanan remarks "Over the years I've witnessed changes both inside and outside the firm. The most remarkable is the complete overhaul of equipment which

has taken place during the last year" (p.160). The speech ends with polite applause, and Mrs. Vealfoy ends the scene with the remark "we've no further need of you". Buchanan then joins the lunch queue for his last firm meal, and "*no one speaks to him, or is aware of his presence*" (p.161).

But if the oppression is of the present, it is related to a long and well preceded tradition. A recurrent theme in Orton's work which conforms to a general pattern of black comedy in this early part of our period, is that of the furniture being rearranged in the same prison cell. "Everything's in a state of flux", says Ramsay's father in Up Against It, "we live in an era of constant change and extreme conservatism" (p.70). In that play there is an obsession with change for the modern, yet the four suffering heroes find that throughout their picaresque journey the same figures invariably appear at the top of each new social scale, whilst those they exploit also recur at the bottom of the hierarchy. In The Good and Faithful Servant, the same theme is conveyed by the running gag about the "victim" figures and their morality, a joke which is perhaps a little overplayed. When Edith reveals the unfortunate result of her brief encounter with Buchanan fifty years before, Buchanan comments earnestly "promiscuity always leads to unwanted children" and adds, when he hears of the circumstances surrounding his grandson's birth, "their morals must surely have been below average" (p.155). The joke is passed on, like the sins of the fathers, to Ray, who comments unfavourably on his grandparents' morality (p.167), adding, "the country's moral values, far from changing, seem to remain unnaturally constant" (p.166). Very shortly, Ray discovers that he has himself "put something into operation a few months ago which

looks like having far reaching consequences" (p.173).

If the country's moral values have not changed, neither have its political and economic values. Ray is eventually forced into the same soul-destroying labours as his grandfather, and in the final scene, after Buchanan's bitterly disappointed death, we see Raymond and Debbie with Edith at the firm "do". The final shot is that of Mrs. Vealfoy, the new woman, standing amongst the old board of directors while leading her employees in a rendition of "On the Sunny Side of the Street" (p.192). The new informal figure of management has throughout been representative of the old hierarchy. Early on, as Charney points out, there is an example of her latent sense of class and position:

MRS. VEALFOY: May we be completely informal and
call you George?

BUCHANAN: By all means.

MRS. VEALFOY: Good, Good (laughs) My name is Mrs.
Vealfoy.

Mrs. Vealfoy's (if you'll permit it) christian name is appropriately never revealed, but Charney speculates that her surname derives from an Anglo-Norman phrase meaning "old faith" or "true faith".²⁷ Certainly the issue of Buchanan's faith and the false consciousness which proceeds from this, are at the heart of the play. Her place in the firm seems to represent a perpetual, but ultimately fallacious offer to break down class barriers, which simply acts as another technique of control. Shepherd has written extensively upon the idea of the firms' "bright hours club" as a form of political control through entertainment, an organisation presided over by Mrs. Vealfoy.²⁸ Before her informal chat with Debbie, which is intended to

arrange the marriage of Ray, she is characteristically heard to issue a memo which belies her bonhomie towards the "intended": "Anyone found using staff lifts without permission will be liable to instant dismissal. (Pause). Circulate to all departments" (p.178). The final image is one of festival without true celebration, as Mrs. Vealfoy confirms, at the play's finale, that the employees will be permitted, for the purposes of Christmas festivity, to dance with the directors wives - "And I think we can invent a ^{new} little rule here - just a tiny new rule - the Lady Employees can ask the directors for a dance" (p.192). In the final analysis, even the feast of fools, which may permit a limited form of self expression, is defeated by being incorporated into company rules, which significantly also cover women for the first time.

For Mrs. Vealfoy power derives absolutely from knowledge. Like Mrs. Mercy after her, she "gives personal hints as well as for the firm" and her "advice covers all fields of endeavour" (p.161). In this way, she assumes political power by assimilating personal prerogative. For Mrs. Vealfoy, any personal matter not covered by the firm's computers is a threat to her own absolute authority, as can be seen by her horror at Buchanan's sudden announcement of the existence of a grandson:

Mrs Vealfoy turns from the mirror. She goes to the desk. She consults the file. She stares at BUCHANAN sharply.

MRS. VEALFOY: Pay attention to me! What grandson? You've no descendants living. I have the information from our records.

BUCHANAN: I've just learned of a descendant of whom I had no knowledge.

MRS. VEALFOY: Who told you?

BUCHANAN: A woman I met in the corridor.

MRS. VEALFOY: Had she any right to inform you of an addition to your family?

BUCHANAN: She was the boy's grandmother.

MRS. VEALFOY: Your wife is dead! Have you been feeding false information into our computers?

BUCHANAN: The woman wasn't my wife. I was young and foolish. It happened a long time ago.

MRS. VEALFOY: I shall inform your section manager. He must straighten this out with Records.

BUCHANAN: It's a personal matter. My private life is involved.

MRS. VEALFOY: Should your private life be involved, we shall be the first to inform you of the fact .

(pp.158-59)

Buchanan's identity has been entirely subsumed by the Mrs. Vealfoys of the world. Such a victim of corporate paternalism is he, that even his limbs have, as Charney points out, been provided by the firm²⁹, giving rise to the revealing scene in which he is disrobed, and walking for the last time from his workplace without his commissionaire's uniform, "he appears smaller, shrunken and insignificant" (p.164). Employment, for Buchanan, has become the only means by which he is able to establish any form of identity at all, so its removal naturally leads to his death.

In Raymond, Mrs. Vealfoy is presented with an entirely different kind of problem, and it is her conflict with him which provides the impetus of the play. Raymond has adapted a strategy which will by now be familiar to the reader in

combatting an intrusive, paternalistic and ultimately destructive bureaucracy - that of fluidity of identity. Mrs. Vealfoy's greatest difficulty in capturing his spirit and bending him to her purposes is revealed by her interview with Debbie about the young girl's pregnancy. Here, the same panic is created by Ray's lack of a tangible identity as occurs in Eh?:

DEBBIE: I hardly know him.

MRS. VEALFOY: Well, you must get to know him. Try to win his confidence. Has he any hobbies to which he is particularly attached?

DEBBIE: No.

MRS. VEALFOY: Where does he work?

DEBBIE: He's unemployed.

MRS. VEALFOY: Where did you meet him?

DEBBIE: He's never asked me to meet him. I usually do it by accident.

MRS. VEALFOY shakes her head: the unusualness of the case has her baffled for a moment.

MRS. VEALFOY: This is a shocking state of affairs. Do you know the young man's name?

DEBBIE: He asked me to call him Ray. What his motive was in asking me to do such a thing, I can't say. [...]

MRS. VEALFOY: He's got you into trouble and he may have done it under an assumed name. That fact has to be faced. (p.163)

Facing facts is as much part of Mrs. Vealfoy's philosophy as it was Agnes' in A Scent of Flowers. Her advice is, of course, that Ray must be caught by the reliable device of designation of

identity:

MRS. VEALFOY: You must arrange a definite time and place of meeting with the young man. Pin him down. Get him to come clean over the matter of his name. That is most important. And then contact me.

(pp.163-64)

Ray has a number of advantages over Mrs. Vealfoy - he is of unknown address, and his unemployment is of a kind which does not lend itself to societal control:

BUCHANAN: Your birth certificate.

RAY: I've never seen it.

BUCHANAN: When you applied to join in the pension scheme.

RAY: What pension scheme?

BUCHANAN: At your firm. Where you work.

RAY: I don't work.

BUCHANAN: Not work? *(he stares, open-mouthed)*

What do you do then?

RAY: I enjoy myself.

BUCHANAN: That's a terrible thing to do. (p.167)

Such a lifestyle would appear to give Ray a fair chance, especially as he is wise enough to reject Buchanan's offer of an introduction to Mrs. Vealfoy ("She'll advise you what to do with your life" - p.168). But Ray's tragedy is that he does not reckon upon Mrs. Vealfoy's capacity to call upon the willing victims of her outlook, who surround Ray, to ensnare him into a marriage which inevitably leads to his consignment to the same industrial anonymity as destroyed the lives of Edith and Buchanan. Debbie, Buchanan and Edith all participate in tracking down the unfortunate young man, and he is eventually

brought to a crucial meeting with Mrs. Vealfoy. Here, claiming her usual agnosticism and non-moralistic outlook, she convinces Ray, by a series of sophistries, to conform to the conservative institutions of marriage, children and career (pp.180-83). Raymond finally recants his past sins, and Mrs. Vealfoy reveals her baseless pragmatism at the root of her apparent moral neutrality: "Good (smiles). I always like the end achieved to coincide with established practice, though the means to the end may vary with custom" (p.182).

I have concentrated upon the role of women in the former section, not because they are the only "man managing" figures of this kind, but because in a period dominated by male writers, at a time when parts of real substance for female performers were scarcer than in today's theatre, so many parts of this kind should appear among black comedies. This may simply have been a means of taking account of the surge in female managerial employment by playwrights who were, after all, social commentators. It may, perhaps, be interpreted as a form of misogyny by a male writing fraternity. Certainly, Orton has been accused of misogyny by several critics. In Simon Shepherd's Because We're Queers: The Life and Crimes of Kenneth Halliwell and Joe Orton, (London, 1989), the biographer cites Mrs. Vealfoy as central to the portrayal of an inherently misogynistic psychology, although he credits Orton with "a horrific prophesy of Margaret Thatcher", as testimony to an accuracy of observation within his (in this case, specifically homosexual) form of women hating (p.120). In any case, the

examination of this point, interesting as it is, should perhaps be left to the explanations of another critic.

There are, in fact, many cases of male technocratic managerial figures amongst the black comedies of the first half of our period. Roger Milner's How's the World Treating You?³⁰ (1965) is worthy of note among these for the original slant taken upon an archetypal figure. Such is the unusualness of the technique of this forgotten play, that it rewards a somewhat lengthy examination. In the character of Frank More, we have yet another post-war meritocrat figure, a man who, from the start, is seen as a person of (apparently) no particularly privileged background, who, through the course of the play, rises to be a person of minor note, then falls at the pinnacle of his success. What marks out How's the World Treating You? as unusual is that Frank, although patently written to satirise the meritocracy, is quite the most sympathetic figure in the play. Frank seems to be a figure of intelligence and merit, but his rise to power is dictated entirely by the forces of the old Britain which embraces him. In what amounts to a "history play" of the most direct kind, Frank's rise is traced over the conventional three acts at intervals of a decade over post-war history: 1946, the significantly loaded year of 1956, and, finally a projected 1966. At each stage of this development, much reference is made to the need for individuals of high calibre in the New Britain, but at no point do we see any such figure. Even the central "meritocrat", who does have ability and intelligence (p.111), is basically inept, coming upon his opportunities by nepotism and accident.

Our story opens at a Transit Camp in the North of England in 1946, when Frank More, described in the *dramatis personae*

as "hero" (p.109) is introduced by an incident which immediately displays his incompetence. He has been put in charge of a unit, having worked his way up to the rank of Captain through the war (p.115), but having placed them on a train to the demobilisation camp, Frank "loses" his men, and his trousers into the bargain. Very early on the subject of "man management" is broached, and Frank, the absence of whose trousers and men is not noticed, is told of the management skills of the C.O. by Mike Holden, the adjutant:

...One of the men had to go short, so he gave him a pair of his old tennis flannels he'd grown out of. How's that for man management? [...] When it comes to man management I take my hat off to him.

He can talk to them in their own language. (p.117)

The question of the men's language, and the C.O.'s grasp of it, is answered almost as soon as it is raised at the C.O.'s appearance. He proves to be a cardboard cut-out figure (indeed, he enters symbolically, carrying just such a figure) of an upper-class guards officer. Right on cue, he begins by discussing his capacity to "handle" his men as the leading passion of his life ("C.O.: You've got me on my favourite hobby horse. I could talk forever of it/MORE: Sex, sir?/C.O.: No man management. Same thing of course, but..."-pp.122-23) but confesses, without knowing it, in the same breath to incompetence in his hobby horse, having been posted from the Guards to his current job, having caused the death of most of his division in Italy. The C.O. is a figure taken directly, it would seem, from Evelyn Waugh - obsessed with the absurd customs and social rituals of his beloved regiment, yet at the same time corrupt, cowardly and openly nepotistic. He offers Frank a

succession of increasingly absurd positions, beginning with a more senior job in the regiment, and culminating in a place in the British Olympic team, all on the assumption that he is "one of us", but begins to become doubtful when Frank reveals that he has no private income (pp.124-26).

The C.O., leader and man manager, is in fact chronically deluded and quite helpless. To his nymphomaniac wife, anywhere North of the Humber is Scotland (p.132) and so too for the C.O., who is unable to put on a pair of trousers (he has lost his own to Frank, having finally noticed their absence after Frank mentions his debagging in conversation) without the assistance of an orderly (p.133). The humour which centres around this old fossil is farcical and Simpsonian, setting the tone for the next two acts, yet there is at first some hope that Frank will become a true meritocrat, in that he rejects the blandishments of first the C.O., then his wife, who remarks "With my husband's backing you're bound to go right to the top" (p.147). Even though he has gone along with, and indeed endorsed many of the more ridiculous rituals encouraged by his insane superior officer (p.118), it would seem, at the end of the first act, that he will, as Violet suggests "be a success at whatever he does" (p.142), without the assistance of the old hierarchy.

But the reality of Post-War Britain is exposed in the next act. Act II, 1956, opens at a debutantes ball, where Frank is a guest, not as a headmaster, but as an insignificant teacher at a minor public school. His hosts, Mr. and Mrs. Cross are to be the great leap forward for Frank's ambitions, since he has impregnated their Daughter Deirdre, a pupil at his school, and will be obliged to marry her, thereby propelling himself into the commanding heights. Mr. Cross, a stockbroker, is a familiar

enough figure. Once again we have a man very much of his class, whose greatest moment in life came, he says, when he assisted in the breaking of the General Strike of 1926 (pp.150-151). Once again, this character and his wife are both presented as very mad indeed, and the most intensely syllogistic dialogue is placed mainly into their mouths, whilst Frank is portrayed almost naturalistically. On the revelation of Deirdre's condition, Mr. Cross reveals that, despite his rhetoric about hard work and good judgement (p.158) being the only means of putting a person at the heart of power (a fallacy in his case, since he merely married money and then attempted to murder his wife - p.177) his real obsession is with retaining the power of the class to which he belongs, a situation which leads to the exhumation of some old jokes:

MR. CROSS: How did you meet Deirdre?

MORE: She was in my class.

MR. CROSS: What class is that? Middle, upper, working...?

MORE: History class (p.168)

Significantly, however, Frank has revealed that his own background is more affluent than we have been led to believe - his own father, he tells Mr. Cross, was a stockbroker (pp.158-159). It is at this point that it is decided that Frank's future choice of career is to be within this corrupt and ritual-bound class. He is to be pushed into the new technocratic boom industry of the affluent society, the production of washing machines. Mr. Cross encourages Frank to go into washing machines, adding that he will immediately make ten times his current salary (p.173). We are surely intended to call to mind John Bloom, the washing machine king, here, as a ruthless self

publicist and archetypal new man, who made and lost a fortune between 1958 and 1964 in the newly expanded market, perhaps the earliest example of the now common syndrome epitomised by the egregious Mr. Branson.³¹ Mr. and Mrs. Cross are, despite her old money background, very much of the modern, expanding section of industry. They are obsessed, as was Bloom, with the world of commercials and mass marketing, even to the extent of singing and dancing to the music of TV commercials (p.149). It is down this road that Frank looks set to finally achieve greatness.

But ten years on, the finale witnesses a demise still more lugubriously funny than that of Bloom. Frank has suffered a breakdown. Having become the technician responsible for the invention of a new washing machine which, like the society around him, is seriously flawed, Frank has driven his firm to the verge of bankruptcy (at about this time Bloom's bankruptcy was the talk of the quality newspapers) and is unable, in principle, to continue selling his machines (pp.181-82). Frank expresses a desire to return to education, but even this liberal principle is flawed by a class-specific destination:

DEIDRE: You think it's more important to be
Headmaster of Eton than selling washing machines.

MORE: Yes, I do.

MISS CLEGG: But Mr. More, you're so wrong. You
ask any housewife which she'd rather have in her
kitchen, a washing machine or the Headmaster of
Eton - she'll soon tell you. (pp.182-83)

In fact, with the company's senior partner, Mr. Robinson, intending to shoot Frank for his technological and sales failures, and Frank himself in any case suicidal, his future does not look good. Frank has rejected the values inherent to

his job (p.199), but he falls into the hands of yet another benevolent upper-class figure, Miles Scace of Scace's Suicide Clinic, a man attuned to the era of psychological manipulation, and the obviously mad psychologist attempts to bring Frank back into the mainstream, rather than allowing him to ease out of a lifestyle which is plainly too much for him. Frank is convinced to go on, and, with his technocrat's hat on, attempts to perfect his washing machine.

This he does, but at the height of his triumph, as he demonstrates the success of the new, improved machine, it explodes, and he is killed by a piece of shrapnel. Frank dies by his own hand with the only creation which was truly his, rather than other people's. Those who have made him surround him after the accident without even realising that Frank has been injured. So much is he of theirs, rather than his own, making that they do not perceive the injury to him until some time after his affliction (p.210).

The play comes back to Orton's joke about a world dominated by constant change and continued conservatism. Nothing actually changes, except the aesthetics of social control throughout the play, a fact which is emphasised by the deterministic suggestion of the title. Frank is in fact acted upon by his environment, and does nothing to create it for himself. The play's circularity also underlines the idea of the conservatism and unchanging nature of Frank's world. His death is suggestive of our first sight of him - he recalls his old C.O. as the march of the British Grenadiers plays in the background, until his body falls to the floor at the curtain (p.214). This constantness is also reinforced by the cast, as Frank's main antagonists in each act, the C.O., Mr. Cross and Miles Scace are

all, Milner stresses, to be played by the same actor, as indeed are the other three supporting roles in each act. Only Frank and Deirdre, who by the third act is estranged from her shotgun husband, reappear as themselves. Milner goes as far as to suggest that the other actors should indeed be the same characters "with perhaps different names and disguises" (p.109). The play is the most deterministic in its group, since it is, as I have stated, truly historic in its vision, and by creating a character who does nothing to become one of the new technocrats, it provides an explanation for a contemporary phenomenon, both satirising the social event and sympathising with its inept exemplification, Frank More.

In Vibrations (1968)³², Stanley Eveling creates character D, who amongst the play's four nameless characters, epitomises the same phenomenon but through an entirely different approach to character development. No explanation is provided for D's presence, except as a friend of C, and as the play continues, he seems to be a cool and detached observer of what goes on, watching the self-revelation by each of the other characters, without exposing anything of his own nature. The description of D provided by Eveling is of a figure by now quite familiar in plays of this kind:

D is a young, bald-headed man, dressed in a plain blue suit and dark tie. He wears thick spectacles.

It is difficult to place him, to say what he is.

(p.108)

Shortly afterwards, it is not surprisingly revealed that he is a person of influence in the city, but "not a broker, exactly" (p.109). D. watches the other three, adding very little to the proceedings for some time, as B and C begin a mock trial of A and

D then begins to add interjections at significant moments, on each occasion causing the game to escalate further (pp.132,137,142), so that the trial eventually ends in the execution of A by B and C, who are also killed by what proves to be an unspecified prior arrangement by D. All this has occurred under D's orders, but the basis of his authority is, as with the powerful technocrats of the age, vague, and in no way accountable, so that when A, in panic, challenges D's basis of authority, questioning whether anyone voted for him (p.138), the question might be extended to the moral authority of all such figures. The question raised by this is: in an entirely materialistic modern world, who does have the capacity to dictate moral, and therefore non-rational absolutes? It is a question best answered by an examination of the general conflicts between rational and technocratic figures, and their non-rational attackers in this group of plays.

What exactly was the new political ethic to do to areas of people's lives outwith the workplace and public life? Attempts to answer such questions were frequently inadvertently alarming. One of the key new lifestyle theorists of the period was Sir Leon Bagrit, whose Reith Lectures of 1964 were presented as a book titled The Age of Automation.³³ Here, Sir Leon undertakes to describe a new society in which humankind, freed of many of its previous obligations to labour, would be able to pursue other interests, particularly developing lifestyle choices and cultivating "new opportunities for social enrichment" - the title, in fact, of his final lecture.³⁴ Bagrit

considers automation "an extension of man"³⁵, and reveals that his own ideal individual of this society would be similar to a sixteenth century renaissance man³⁶ - a figure of greatly developed intelligence and truly varied interests. He sees a knowledge of science as a keynote for individual development, but adds that "It is essential in my opinion that all children, especially in their teens, should be exposed to artistic and musical and other cultural influences as frequently as possible".³⁷ His hope is that the affairs of humankind, or mankind, as he would put it, would soon be run by "science-orientated humanists"³⁸, and that the image of the technologist might be improved by television: "If television could create a sort of glamorous engineering Dr. Kildare, this situation [the poor public image of the technocrat] might change, and we might be well and truly launched into the Age of Automation".³⁹ But it is in the field of potential "social enrichment" that Sir Leon comes into his element, especially in dealing with the increased number of women in the workforce. His liberality is such that he would increase the tax burden upon women in employment, in order to force them back into the home, thereby forestalling the increased unemployment created by technological growth. He explains that "many women would prefer to go to the hairdresser than to the factory".⁴⁰ Certainly, Sir Leon finds some instruction in the ways of women from the age of technology:

frequently it has been said that if women do not occupy themselves with domestic work their minds will be empty and they will be unhappy. But the exact opposite is proving to be the case. We find women busily buying every conceivable gadget

to avoid having to do monotonous repetitive work. As a result they have more time to devote to their children, their husbands and their homes, more time to look pretty and attractive, and more time to raising the general cultural level of their lives.⁴¹

To expose such deficiencies in such modern liberal thinkers as Bagrit is of course rather fun, but also a little unfair. However remiss it may have been for the bulk of the first post war generation to have ignored the equality of women as a social issue, they did so, leaving it off the political agenda, so in effect it is almost as unjust to attack Sir Leon's primitive misogyny as it would be to berate Gladstone for not being a unilateralist. The more important shortcoming, which this book shares with others of its time, is another form of blindness. Whilst there is much talk of this ill-defined "cultural development" in Bagrit's book, there is no real mention of spiritual development under the new technocratic regime. The decline of religion in modern society is a subject left untouched, there is no attempt to provide other, pre-rational notions with which to replace the old faiths. Cultural changes dictated by lifestyle choices were clearly not the answer.

From the earliest days of the marketing of technology as a political issue, voices were raised against it as a complete solution to Britain's problems even in such conservative publications as The Spectator.⁴² By March 1967, when the foundering Torrey Canyon created one of the greatest of the post-war ecological catastrophes, a great public outcry against rapid technological advance without regard to the consequences

was widely echoed in the thinking press. The New Statesman editorial of 31 March, 1967 observed that: "The Torrey Canyon disaster sprang from technical progress in the 1950s. What must we fear from the advances of the sixties?"⁴³ A more thoughtful editorial from The Listener came as close to mirroring student thought of the period as ever it would in reflecting upon the limitations of modernisation, remarking "that simple materialism is not enough, and its inadequacy is becoming more apparent". The problem is described as a "religious" issue, although "the answer may not be the orthodox answers of any established religion".⁴⁴

This search for "religious" answers is observable in all of the plays we have discussed in the former section. It is a theme held in common with the issues of class background and the rise of the "meritocratic" technocracy. The earlier quotation of Bernard Levin, conjuring up the image of Tony Benn as a High Priest of the new technology is a sentiment frequently expressed (though not so frequently with Tony Benn as its target), since the idea of technology subsuming religion and mythic custom is a central concern of the period. Throughout the black comedies of the period, the rational world is in a continual state of conflict with darker, more mystical forces. There are very few exceptions to the treatment of this theme in the black comedies of the sixties. Of course, many plays of the sixties and seventies outwith our particular field deal with this issue, notable examples being Rudkin's Afore Night Come and Shaffer's Equus, but each of these plays is more concerned with developing individual characters, to whom psychological depth is added by demonstration of their need of religious and quasi religious absolutes. In black comedies of the period, this need is

assumed from the start, and psychological complexity is unimportant, indeed a hindrance, to the main political purpose of illustrating the conflict between this irrational need and the rationalistic, public world of materialism and career. Various means are found of expressing this need, ranging from an unorthodox, occulted approach to the failed state religions, to apparently insane beliefs in, and encounters with, mystics and supernatural figures. Endless examples of such quests appear in the first half of our designated period of 1964 to 1974, but I will return to the plays discussed in the last section, in order more readily to illustrate the direct connection between, and the inherent conflicts of, the rationalistic technocrat and the struggle for pre-rational forms of faith.

The means by which June Buckeridge repels the attacks upon both herself and her alter ego, Sister George, is mainly the mysticism of Madame Xenia, a clairvoyant who is both friend and neighbour to June. Xenia forewarns June of her downfall by predicting, by cartomancy, the "death" of Sister George and the end of June's relationship with Alice (pp.23-25). She is a significant figure in the plot, since she not only acts as moral commentator, being the only figure who stands outside the menage of June, Alice and Mercy, but also is the only character who is seen to counteract Mercy to any affect at all. The only point at which Mercy, normally the immaculate technocrat, appears out of her depth, occurs when Xenia begins to make a series of unwelcome and quite mortifying predictions about both June and herself (pp.57-59), a scene in which the humour is, for the last time in the play, stepped up to farce. Xenia has the age-old function of wise fool, with the right, denied to others, of making open, perceptive and sometimes aggressive assessments of

character. This is the case, not only with Mercy, but also Alice, whose fundamental weakness of character is pointed out in no uncertain terms by the mystic (pp.50-51). As what clearly amounts to a caricatured Gypsy, a comic turn, Marcus has to move Xenia out of the action for the melodramatic climax, but Xenia has already predicted a tragic end by suicide for June (p.53). Her record of accurate prediction is liable to leave an audience in doubt of June's future at the curtain. The power and influence of the mystic figure of The Killing of Sister George is contrasted with that of the church, which is, as we have seen, as destructive and impersonal towards June, as Xenia is constructive and supportive.

There is an equally mystical solution to the problems of confrontation with automated technology and its agents for Val Brose in Eh?, although it takes an entirely different form. Val's form of confrontation with the new establishment is escape into a pre-rational state, induced by his beloved magic mushrooms, which appear to provide him with a vision of perfect order, albeit one which at first causes the outside world to regard him with some alarm (p.45). Although dubbed a maniac by Reverend Mort, the C.of E. rugger blue nevertheless attempts to instill supernatural fear into Val in order to attain an admission of belief in his paradoxically rational church (pp.52-54). This attempt however, comes to nothing, for Val revels in a kind of pre-hippy euphoria (p.73) which motivates the young man, and finally affects his protagonists. There is evidence that Val has become a kind of messiah by the end of the play, as Mort and Price are influenced by his psychedelic vision, and return for more mushrooms. Val has become a kind of saviour, and his mushrooms a loaves and fishes analogy:

MORT: D'you mind if I have a bite?

VAL: Go ahead. There'll be thousands, tell your friends.

MORT: I'll settle this.

To VAL

From an entirely scientific viewpoint. (p.72)

Whilst Mort, completely overwhelmed by the affect of the mushrooms, his legs rubbery and his head full of hallucinations, attempts an absurd scientific examination of the phenomena that have gone before, Aly, the only remaining character unaffected by Val's weirdness, appears for a final examination of Val's visionary status:

ALY: Do you see beyond life?

VAL: No.

ALY: Do you comprehend life in its totality?

VAL: No.

ALY: Excuse me, you appear to be in a trance like condition. Do you assure me that you see nothing?

VAL: Yes.

ALY: I wonder why that should be?

VAL: I've got this bad eyesight.

ALY (sighs): I shall never know what is god. How can you have a whole ^{small} country with no mystical experience except dominoes and Guinness?

VAL: God is a circle whose centre is everywhere and its circumference nowhere.

ALY: You may be right. (p.74)

Aly, who is not of this rational country, and who does not partake in the magic mushrooms seems to fare slightly better than Price, Mort and Mrs. Murray, but the audience is left with no clear idea

of whether Val is a visionary, a madman or an idiot. Whatever the answer, his apparently alternative spiritual values becomes one of the few examples of the technocrats defeated in the period.

A similar example of mystical, and possibly insane vision occurs in Belcher's Luck, where Victor never actually resists the incursions of Helen's new world extension of the old class system, but does find a means of avoiding a confrontation with this force, which destroys Sir Gerald Catesby and Harry Belcher. His particular communion with his spiritual self is manifested by his delusion that he sees the ghosts of the great philosophers about the estate. His consultations with Locke, Hobbes, Kant and others provide him, at worst, with a means of irritating his hated father, and at best with a smooth way of surviving beyond the old protestantism of Sir Gerald, the caring scepticism of Lucy and the primitive pragmatism of old Belcher. The question of whether the manifestations are real to Victor is never answered, but whatever the answer, they do keep Helen at bay until his rivals are gone and he can adapt and survive as part of the new regime. It is not whether or not he sees the ghosts that matters, Mercer seems to suggest, but the fact that he survives beyond those who hold old faiths, or no faith whatever.

The Secret Sportsman also suffers from the need of a mystical experience in contrast to his high-powered modernity. For all his power in the public world, Teddy follows the lunatic blindly, admitting in the opening lines of the play that he believes the Lunatic to have "something to say" (p.9). No move can be made without first consulting the raving madman, who, like Barnes' 13th Earl of Gurney, believes himself to be Jesus

Christ (p.10). Teddy cannot act until a nebulously defined moment of revelation from the Lunatic: "I may have to sit for Parliament after I've got some sense out of him. I may have to go to the people. But until then I'm impotent" (p.14). The Secret Sportsman is proud of his rejection of the established church (p.16), yet he cannot free himself of the need for spiritual guidance, so he calls the Lunatic "a blessed saint" (p.18) after a particularly intense bout of ranting. The Lunatic works in part to escalate the farcical dangerousness of Teddy's situation - he is unpredictable, histrionic and noisy - - the audience can see that he is in another movie, but Teddy cannot. He brings about the major crisis of the play by assaulting Elsie, opening Teddy up to scandal, which threatens to end his career in politics and the city (pp.28-34). The resultant prison spell helps the Secret Sportsman not at all, since having been caught by the police in transvestite disguise, he is sentenced to a term in Holloway, rather than a men's prison. The trauma seems to have helped Teddy at first (pp.56-57), but his plans for a respectable married life with Doris are quickly upset by the reappearance of the Lunatic. Teddy's want of spiritual guidance immediately reappears, and he follows the Lunatic off at the climax, seeking an enlightenment which the technocratic material world cannot fulfil.

In Fanghorn, Joseph's ideological position in the meritocracy is ambiguous from the start, since in his world there is a concealed place for the irrational, which manifests itself in his condemnation of communism.

My lambs, two thirds of the world are clamped in
the benevolent thumbscrews of dictatorship where
the logical supremacy of the mind squashes the

messiness of the human heart. (p.17)

It seems that on this basis he runs a fantasy life incorporating ghosts, animated teddy bears and fictional pets such as "pussy-dog". But like his false meritocracy, his spiritual impulses also embrace a kind of oblique, even perverse form of the status quo. The covered object which has been concealed for the first half of the play proves to be a paradoxical symbol, a perfect scale model of a cathedral:

JOSEPH: It took boyhoods. A woman's clumsy fingers could not have embroidered the unicorn entwined with the Christ - like I did.

TAMARA: But you don't believe in Christ. You're only inventing your own mythologies.

JOSEPH: I never said I believed. It was something to do. (pp.45-46)

Only Tamara, who appears to be from outside the establishment, like the communists, is unable to see Wolfy the pussy-dog, and it is pointed out by Grandpa that her lack of any beliefs will continue to prevent her from so doing (p.55). Strangely, Joseph's power appears by the end of the play to rest, like a religious faith, upon a series of unverifiable faiths. Questions of verification are raised about his former marriage (p.72), his divorce (p.69), his alleged murder of a former wife (p.74), and even his position as a cabinet minister itself (p.77). All are, in the end, as much a question of faith as pussy-dog, and the ghost. Again, a Christ analogy is raised, as Tamara claims that Jackie's faith in her father rests not upon seeing him as a powerful man in a political world, but as the saviour himself (p.59). It is only by establishing such absolutes, Pinner feels, that we can strike a balance between

our political and private lives. The contrast is made absolute in this play, since Tamara, who has access to much private information about Joseph without ever having met him (she seems to know more about Joseph than his current wife, whom she has secretly known for some time, in both the biblical and more common sense of the term) may in fact be a fictional manifestation of Joseph's own rational side.

Transcending, too is shaped around a confrontation with a mystical figure. Mr. Lemster, the Girl's spiritual mentor, is a medium, although he is clearly also a fraud. Of his desire for the Girl he remarks to his father:

I would first like to have her as my mistress,
second to have her as my daughter, and third
as a business partner to make me a successful
medium.

FATHER: In that order?

LEMSTER: Take my advice and stick to that order
and you'll find you make some progress. (p.20)

All of the solutions offered by the other characters to the Girl are material, not spiritual, and her appeal to Simon for advice about whether or not to go to the abbey for prayers is riposted by the simple reply that he is a materialist, and cannot advise her on the matter (p.24). The bogus humanitarianism of the Mother is expressed at the end of the play when, after attempting to radiate understanding throughout she, in common with the other characters, is astonished to find that her daughter has become a nun (pp.36-37). The characters are driven by irrational impulses which they cannot perceive. Sexuality is the chief driving force pushing all of the characters along with a farcical logic of its own, but it is unrecognised by all except

the Girl and the audience for whom she is moral commentator. Thus when Simon, lying on Lemster's bed, is finally struck with the idea of seducing the Girl, he has to hand an unlikely logical explanation:

Association is an interesting phenomenon by which an idea is conveyed not by logic, but by, in fact, association. The idea that Lemster had in this bed has suddenly been conveyed to me in very startling terms. (p.28)

Only by giving away to her spiritual self is the Girl able to overcome the confusion which dogs the other characters.

The characters, aside from the Girl, of Transcending are trapped within the limits of their rationalism, and, like most converts to the world of the white-hot era of technology, attempt to substitute materialism for faith. One witnesses the logical extension of such belief in Eveling's Vibrations (1968), where the characters are so unredeemably materialistic that, deprived of any better article of faith, they are ironically made to quote Wittgenstein at their swearing-in for the trial (p.106). Having no basis for real moral authority, the disaster which overtakes characters A B and C is determined by their inability to make ethical decisions about D's apparently rational actions. A less surrealistic version of the same dilemma is presented in Come and Be Killed, which because of its subject matter, is bound to raise issues of faith. The system of "autonomous legislators in a kingdom of ends" (p.65) Jim rejects, as part of a desire for absolute values. He "believes" in all of the liberal causes of his day, but adds the reservation that his "feelings reveal themselves as definitely on the side of the brute" (p.23). Eveling seems to

contextualise Jim's modern dilemma within the philosopher's traditional dualistic dilemma, in a manner more rigorous than most of his contemporaries. Jim's attempts to locate an entirely materialistic and non-doctrinaire lifestyle (p.65) are belied by his continual need of ritual, so that at various times he puts to half-ironic use the rituals of confession (p.69) and communion (pp.97-98). For all this, a sense of moral responsibility for his actions permeates his behaviour. Bettina detects a latent Hindu in Jim (p.100), and whilst he doubts this, he is driven to confess his own position as one of "absolute rectitude" (p.101). His self-assurance is finally shaken by a highly ritualised gesture with the dead, skinned rabbit as a symbol of the foetus, a ceremony which reveals that he, too, is much moved by ritual, symbols and the absolute values which he has, throughout, sought to deny in himself (pp.107-108).

Ritual is also freely used in A Scent of Flowers, where Scrivens, the callously professional funeral director, who puts faith entirely in the rituals surrounding death, rather than their spiritual or symbolic meanings (pp.6 and 9), plays the priest in the second act (p.27), applying the same professional zeal to being a spiritual healer. Zoe's religious needs are expressed, yet again, by a perversion of the passionless faith of the catholics around her. She burns a cross into her arm (p.52), yet cannot take the ossified rituals of the church seriously (p.53). As Scrivens returns to his former guise in the final act, a series of rituals are performed with "reverential brevity" (p.72), and Zoe, despite her contempt for such rituals, a contempt shared by most of the characters, disappears into oblivion at their completion, with the words:

it's all over, you see; the ritual is finished.
No more formalities; no more Zoe. Just a little
silence, a light rain falling from a colourless
sky, and a slight scent of flowers. You can go
home now. (p.75)

Her own absolute faith in things above the rational world of her
step-mother and Scrivens and, indeed, the priest, is
continually reaffirmed by her presence, as a ghost, upon the
stage throughout, so that the final image is one of faith
vindicated, but vindicated quite hopelessly in the face of a
modern, material world.

The other form of quest for absolute values manifested in
this group occurs in How's The World Treating You? Milner's
Frank More manifests no evident belief in anything other than
the new world which is created about him during the play's
panorama of Post-War social history. In the final act however,
he begins to be influenced by Scace, and his values are
challenged by the psychologist:

SCACE: Now tell me what you know about your inner
man.

MORE: My what?

SCACE: Your Soul.

MORE: My Soul?

SCACE: Yes, if you're C of E you must believe
you've got one.

MORE: Yes, I suppose I do, but...

SCACE: Not that I do myself, but I like the hymns.

(pp.198-99)

Scace is a sceptic who prefers to use religion as a tool of
manipulation, having created a number of religious maniacs

amongst his patients (p.199). What he amounts to is the same kind of Shaman figure as is represented by Dr. Rance in What The Butler Saw, a mystic praying to the god of science, a man whose vision is clearly insane, but is clothed in the robes of scientific respectability.

At the end of Vic Feather's seminal work on Trade Unionism of the sixties, the author foresaw a role in government and management of "new men", selected from the lower classes, who would play an increasingly important role in the new technology-based economy, but cautioned against a new form of privilege which might develop amongst such individuals.⁴⁵ By the early date of 1967, in their essay on "the classless society" Antony Jay (I suspect, primarily) and David Frost⁴⁶ located precisely the social phenomenon against which Feather had warned us, referring to the newly risen as "probationary upper classes".⁴⁷ Writers of black comedy had, as we have seen, always favoured the latter view, where they did not dismiss completely the possibility that the new managers could be anything but the old upper classes in disguise. By late 1967, the social and economic dilemmas of post devaluation Britain saw the Wilson administration drop the meritocracy theme as a political gimmick. This perhaps accounts for the relegation of the "new man" as a political lampoon amongst the black comedies of the latter sixties, where, although by no means extinct, such figures became increasingly incidental as subjects of satire.

There are a number of important similarities in the plays incorporating the first period of meritocratic satire in the

decade. Firstly, all of the plays within the previous section have portrayed a conflict of interests, in very stark and simple terms, between alternative and mainstream lifestyles. However modern the meritocrat, there is always a bugbear who exists within the system to subvert their lifestyle and expectations. In some cases, such as that between Ray and Mrs. Vealfoy in The Good and Faithful Servant, Val and Mrs. Murray in Eh?, June/Xenia and Mrs. Mercy in The Killing of Sister George, or B and D in Vibrations, the conflict is put in very bold terms to the audience, and leads to the completely inevitable destruction of one or both of the conflicting interests. In a play like The Lunatic, the Secret Sportsman and The Woman Next Door, the conflict is less immediate, since Ted's fascination for the Lunatic prevents him from attempting directly to destroy him, yet the conflict is just as pronounced, since it is quite clear from the outset that there can only be a resolution by the destruction of one or the other of the contending lifestyles - in this case, unusually, the losing party would appear to be the establishment figure. In each case, for one reason or another, be it the importance in terms of work and the public world of such characters as Val, Ray and June, or the essentialness of the Lunatic to the spiritual world of the Secret Sportsman, the alternative lifestyle is, until he or she is destroyed or brings about destruction, a central part of the mainstream world of his or her protagonist. In many ways, these people exemplify Brenton's vision of the hippy alternative lifestyle of the pre-1968 period - people who are able to eat away, like a benevolent cancer at the fabric of society and change it from within. I should add, though, that because these playwrights are from a slightly earlier period than Brenton, they are able to see

latent conflicts which will not be tolerated for long amongst alternative lifestylists, a fact which the playwrights arriving in the late sixties and early seventies would have to rediscover.

All of the plays also attempt, quite directly, to contravene the very idea of the meritocracy, accepting it as an existent body on no level at all. This of course seems obvious, but what I mean is that they would not admit, on any level, to such a benevolent and liberal movement as existing. ^{They} make no concession to the idea of the well-intentioned individual, ^{working} within a social movement which may incorporate a great deal of opportunism and ruthlessness. In some cases, the existence of the movement itself is simply denied, as in Fanghorn, or The Lunatic, The Secret Sportsman and The Woman Next Door, where the meritocracy is seen as a public myth from behind which the old class structure, as satirised in the Lord Home and House of Lords cycle of black comedy, emerges in times of crisis. In other cases, such as The Good and Faithful Servant and The Killing of Sister George, the social background of these immaculately spoken, "classless" individuals is not closely examined, but rather, their bogus "caring" ideology, which serves the old hierarchy and attacks those who are not similarly rapacious and self interested.

Another notable factor is that all of these plays are concerned primarily with public life. A number are set in the workplace, for example, Eh? Others take place in ostensible homes, which are, in fact, places of business, as in The Lunatic, The Secret Sportsman and The Woman Next Door, which takes place in a brothel. Slightly over half of The Good and Faithful Servant takes place at work, whilst the remainder

occurs in a home dominated by the artifacts and shibboleths of work. How's The World Treating You? locates two of its three acts in workplaces, whilst the second act occurs at a debutantes' ball where a "deal" involving marriage and business, is forged. Even plays which are located in completely private environments, such as Transcending, Belcher's Luck and Vibrations are in fact obsessively addressed to public life and work concerns. In Transcending, after all, the characters are motivated entirely by the Girl's need to achieve her A levels. In Belcher's Luck, the murder is committed so that the great private estate of the play's setting can be modernised and turned into a business, whilst each of the characters, except for the hapless Sir Gerald, a relic of the past, are motivated by their need to achieve business, rather than private, aims. In Vibrations, the character D motivates all significant interaction by his public-spirited intrusion into a private apartment, and the series of rituals which are enacted around the trial of B are all "public" events.

The dramatic technique which emerges most naturally around the portrayal of such characters as the easily stereotyped technocrat, or politically designatable meritocrat is the creation of cardboard cut-out figures with little psychological or emotional development. This is obviously the case with characters like Mrs. Mercy Croft, Mrs. Murray and Mrs. Vealfoy, all of whom would appear by their titles to be married, although no husbands are actually referred to by any of them. These are entirely impersonal characters, almost extensions of the technology they support. Even in Belcher's Luck, where Mercer attempts to extend a limited degree of psychological depth to the character of Helen by giving her a succession of set-

piece speeches in which she explains her background, the "private" side of her life, in her sexual relations with Victor and Belcher, is seen as simply a crude transaction mentality, intended to serve purely material ends. Belcher's Luck, and to a much greater degree How's The World Treating You?, are the only exceptions to the rule amongst this group of plays, that one must portray meritocrats as political cartoon figures. The latter play provides its central figure not only with a certain amount of emotional credibility, but also contributes to this credibility by placing him within a deterministic and historical context.

If the new people are portrayed as cartoon figures of vice, their foils are frequently given unusual depths of pathos (for black comedies) to contrast with them. Witness Orton and Marcus, who are not above melodrama (there is no reason why they should be) in portraying such characters as Buchanan and June in their ill-fated fights against the vicious human computers who bring them low. Most of the writers of this group could almost be accused of ahistoricity in their portrayal of characters whose topicality is stressed above their psychological believability, which is not in itself a problem, except that without any device to assist the suspension of disbelief so central to non-naturalistic plays, they inhabit the same universe as "flawed and human" (to plagiarise Mrs. Mercy) characters such as Raymond, Debbie, Jim and Alice. Occasionally these plays could be better described as crude propaganda than political satire, and as such, become less effective in their purposes. It is, after all, not only foolish to suggest that a South African policeman does not love his children as much as Desmond Tutu, it is also an evasion of the political issue at

stake. In this way, I think that plays such as Eh? and The Lunatic are more politically effective than, say, The Killing of Sister George or The Good and Faithful Servant, since their authors make no concessions to the naturalistic, peopling their plays entirely with grotesques and demanding of their audience no more than appreciation of the farce, with its cartoon figures and unbelievable yet instructive manifestations of suffering. Chambers and Prior are, I think, right in pointing out that Eh? (along with Livings' 1962 farce Nil Carborundum) provided critics with an opportunity to enthuse about a character like Val Brose, whose roots lay in popular music hall and more recently such figures as Norman Wisdom (and I might add, Tony Hancock), which they would not otherwise have enjoyed, but they are laying it on a little thick to suggest that the failure of Hobson to see Val as a "real" character with real feelings occurs as a result of his inability to empathise with the working class.⁴⁸ No doubt, Sir Harold's understanding of the beliefs, sufferings and aspirations of the working class is limited, but such insight is as redundant to a character such as Val as is being a coyote to understanding that unfortunate character's failure to make a meal out of the roadrunner.

One other point which should be made about this group of plays is that all of them summon up forms of mystical or spiritual experience, making such experience central to the political conflict. Such manifestations are quite variant, but they all have in common their rejection of conventional Christianity as a solution, and the working of mystical and pre-rational beliefs in favour of those who are in conflict with the technocratic establishment. The contrast between the survival technique of pre-rational belief and the destructive potential

of conventional religion is perhaps illustrated most clearly in Belcher's Luck, where Victor's eccentric claim to see the ghosts of dead philosophers allows him to survive intact, whereas Sir Gerald's conventional christianity is no protection against his fate.

By the 1970s, the personal more than ever before was seen as political amongst liberals and individuals on the left. As Wandor points out, the new feminism of the Women's liberation movement was instrumental in bringing about the change in the perception of liberal Britain over 1968-70.⁴⁹ The meritocratic generation of 1964 had, as I have stated, begun to slip from the attention of writers of black comic satire in the last years of the Wilson administration, but in 1970 with the election of the Heath government, it became important, with the change in political atmosphere which took place under Heath, to examine the legacy of a Labour government which had placed such emphasis on a social grouping, real or apocryphal, that had failed to carry through any real social change. Once again, in the 1970s the meritocrat figure is taken up (although not in such numbers), but with the change in political priorities occasioned by the rise of the New Right, the new forms of poverty, the collapse of the alternative society as represented by the hippy movement and the rise of the women's movement, many of the same kind of characters undergo a massive shift, indeed sometimes a total inversion of thematic and theatrical presentation.

With the rise of the women's movement as a radical

grouping, what I have called the Mrs. Vealfoy syndrome was bound to be revised. Perhaps the most striking example of this revision is Marion in Caryl Churchill's Owners (1972).⁵⁰ This is a character who fulfils , without any of the doubts about class background which may have been raised by earlier dramatists, the figure of the Wilsonian female meritocrat. She is certainly self-made, having taken educational opportunities on offer to become a property speculator, leaving behind her old position of the humble local butcher's wife. Her period of education, when she had met, and had an affair with Alec, is put at seven years before the play's contemporary setting (p.35), making her a product of the height of Wilson's promotion of the meritocracy. She is given speeches which stress her aspiration above her gender and class (although she is petit-bourgeois, rather than working class) specific station (pp.32-33), so that her status as a new "man", as it were, is unchallengable. She chooses, like her predecessors, to manipulate people by "man-management" techniques, rather than direct use of authority. In order to gain her ends with the couple Lisa and Alec, she purchases their rented home, threatening them, through her agent, the grammar school meritocrat (p.12) and suicidal yuppie Worsley with eviction, and then entering as an apparently disinterested party to assist the couple in their hour of need. Sadly, a farcical scene transpires in which Worsley is revealed to Lisa as Marion's employee (pp.27-31), and, her cover blown, Marion resorts to open confrontation. She is also able, like such characters as Mrs. Murray and Helen Catesby, to use her sexuality in order to manipulate the men around her. In one scene she is able to assuage her husband's resentment about the loss of his shop by offering to duplicate for him the strip-

tease he has just watched, and within a minute, convince Worsley to carry out his distasteful orders by kissing him (p.26).

But Marion is not quite, from the start, the perfect human computer that the former women in management were in black comedy. Although occupying the same position in the class hierarchy as the creations of Orton, Marcus, Livings and so forth, Churchill's figure has been humanised. Even her description in the *dramatis personae* is altered, since although the opulent manner of dress is the same, there is also the suggestion of a distorted personality: "MARION is thin and edgy and moves about a lot, often eating. Strong face rather than pretty. Her clothes are expensive but often badly matched, coming undone, slightly askew. Thirties". (p.7). Marion is motivated entirely by what might loosely be called love, or at least a burning desire to possess, to own, a man who has been her greatest love, Alec. This is unlike the satiric figures of the previous generation, some of whom (Mrs. Murray, Helen) do express forms of affection, but only as a transparent element in the pursuit of power. Marion is genuinely enamoured. "it would be you I call for even if I was eighty", she cries to Alec (p.33). Like her black comic antecedents, Marion is a relentless consumer, buying up and selling property as a means of justifying herself to the male world, and symbolically continually eating, regardless of the occasion. She manipulates the poor and needy of housing estates with her purchases, living as it were, off the thin of the land, yet we are prevented from seeing her as the melodramatic villain of former black comedies by the ugly context of her world, and a succession of speeches which go some way to explaining the deterministic process by which her character was created.

Keyssar,⁵¹ however, contends that the text of Owners "avoids psychological explanations". She remarks the play's "presentation of the contiguity of possession of persons and property ; of capitalism, sexism" far removed from "real life", unlike the "despair" and "hollow cynicism" of other modern comedies,⁵² seemingly claiming for the play a particular place away from other black comedies, which she clearly does not see as political. But the location of the play within the genre we are examining is unquestionable. Consider, for example, the early scene between Worsley and Clegg, who coolly and brazenly discuss the planned murder of Marion by the latter, her husband:

CLEGG: One thousand five hundred and seventy five people die daily in England and Wales.

WORSLEY: Fair number.

CLEGG: It's only a matter of making her one of them.

WORSLEY: It's not so easy. Speaking as one who knows.

CLEGG: She's physically a very strong woman. And mentally in some respects.

WORSLEY: But you weren't thinking of unarmed combat?

CLEGG: She did karate once in an evening class.

When she had more time on her hands. No I must find the right tool for the job.

WORSLEY: Is the idea to kill her at all costs or do you count on getting away with it?

CLEGG: I hadn't planned on being caught, no.

WORSLEY: Then a knife would be too much of a clue.

CLEGG: What I'd prefer is a convenient accident.

If she could topple off a cliff.

WORSLEY: A day trip.

CLEGG: You could come ~~with us~~ as a witness.

WORSLEY: A witness is what you don't want. (p.10)

One is forcibly reminded of Orton. It is perhaps a little less ornate of language, but it is dialogue which could quite easily be part of, say Funeral Games or Loot, where murder is discussed just as casually, and self interest is equally obvious.

Where the play is different from Orton is not in the po-faced monstrosity, but in the psychological motivation of its characters. These are not quite cartoon figures in their pursuit of money, power or unadulterated lust as are the comic creations of Orton. The reason for Clegg's desire to murder Marion is his feeling that his traditional male role has been usurped. Displaced and dependant upon his wife, Clegg harbours a homicidal resentment which emerges in large part from his feeling of inadequacy within his societally dictated role of husband. Even Marion's character is saved from melodrama by the series of speeches about the historical forces which have created her:

MARION: Everything I was taught - be clean, be quick, be top, be best, you may not succeed, Marion, but what matters is ^{your} to try hardest. To push on. Onward Christian Soldiers, marching as to war. That was my favourite song when I was seven. Fight the good fight [...] the animals are ours. The vegetables and minerals. For us to consume. We don't shrink from blood. Or guilt. Guilt is essential to progress. You'll tell me next you don't feel guilt. I don't know how you know you're

alive. Guilt is knowing what you do. I see the children with no shoes and socks in the houses I buy. Should I buy them socks? It would be ridiculous. But I feel it. That gritty lump is the pearl. Swine. [She is addressing Alec] And what would happen ^{to work} without guilt? I was never a lazy girl, Marion tries hard. I work like a dog. Most women are fleas but I'm the dog. (p.34)

At the climactic moment when Alec goes to Marion to ask for Lisa's baby (which has been gifted to Marion to stave off eviction) to be returned, she retains the baby as a power symbol and makes a speech which would be inconceivable to characters like Mrs. Vealfoy. ~~Here, she~~ demonstrates a self-awareness which serves to explain why it is that a person can act with such brutality, and thereby diminishes our capacity to see her relationship with Alec and Lisa as the simple one of exploiter and victim:

The more you want it the more it's worth keeping. But you can't just go like that. I haven't paid you to go. Every one of you thinks I will give in. Because I'm a woman ^{is it?} I'm meant to be kind. I'm meant to understand a woman's feelings wanting her baby back. I don't. I won't. I can be as terrible as anyone. Soldiers have stuck swords through innocents. I can massacre too. Into the furnace. Why shouldn't I be Genghis Khan? Empires only come by killing. I won't shrink. Not one of you loves me. But he shall grow up to say he does. (p.69)

There is, in this speech, a pathos which demonstrates

Churchill's desire to have us see the complex determinism which makes of an exploiter a victim, and a victim a person of power. The play ends with Alec dead, as well as the baby of the Arlingtons, Lisa and Alec's neighbours, an innocent in every sense, and Marion seeming to celebrate the dispelling of the soft and enervating feelings of personal affection which have been her downfall throughout:⁵³

MARION: I'm not sorry at all about Alec. Or about that other baby. Not at all. I never knew I could do a thing like that. I might be capable of anything. I'm just beginning to find out what's possible. (p.73)

For all the final melodrama of this speech, Marion's character is seen to be far more broadly determined by aspects beyond her control than any of the meritocrat figures of the sixties, except perhaps for Frank More in the, as I have stated, unrepresentative How's The World Treating You?

What is also evident, is that the play moves its emphasis very much into the private sphere. In fact, despite the very public theme of the land developer attacking the underprivileged, the interaction occurs entirely in microcosm as the battle for possession of a private place, a place to live, although much of the action takes place in the public world, outside Lisa and Alec's flat. The satiric vehicle of a direct, clear cut conflict between particular interest groups resulting in the destruction of one or another party is also abandoned in Owners. Although Marion does quite consciously destroy Alec by ordering Worsley to burn down the flat which has been the subject of debate (pp.69-70), she is compromised in her struggle by her attachment to Alec, so that by killing him (to borrow a

phrase from Hollywood) she also kills a part of herself. Hollywood is an appropriate analogy, for the outline of the plot of Owners is overwhelmingly melodramatic. A wealthy landowner forces her attentions upon an innocent tenant, is rebuffed, threatens he and his family with eviction, steals his baby and finally, after forcing his wife into an abortive affair with another person of power, destroys her quarry and an innocent into the bargain. Aside from the obvious (but significant) sexual role reversal, the plot is lifted from The Perils of Pauline, and surely deliberately so, for in contrasting this melodramatic scenario with the actuality of a group of equally sad and tragically interdependent characters, Churchill escapes the simple political moralism of some of the satirists discussed earlier.

In Mercer's Duck Song (1974)⁵⁴, we are again presented with the stereotypical figure of the young professional in Jane, the cool and analytic psychiatrist, an aggressive young woman who would appear to be a continuation of Claire from his earlier After Haggerty (1970). Unlike the sanitised liberals of earlier works, such as the Mother in Transcending, or Agnes in A Scent of Flowers, her caring does not amount to simple egotistical self-aggrandisement. Rather, it actually compromises her powerful position in the public world (it is difficult to say exactly how powerful this position is, since the play is, once again, located entirely in the private home and concentrates largely on interpersonal relations, which are spiced up by a modicum of political preaching, practised by all of the characters upon one another), since she expresses a kind of fierce, politically motivated form of love. Once again this form of love is impersonal in its realisation, expressing

itself, however unconsciously on Jane's part, in terms of possession. Eddie Bone, her working-class lover who knows he's on to a good thing, is keenly aware of the terms of their relationship, describing himself as having been "collected" by Jane (p.26). As a serious liberal intellectual, it emerges that Jane's relationship with Eddie is a "cause", and that she tolerates his eccentricities through political conviction, making it once again a mutual interdependence of exploiter and exploited. That Eddie is exploited is witnessed by his constant fetching and carrying for the family - he is obliged to mow the lawn (p.11), not through economic pressure, but as a means of escaping the overwhelming presence of Maurice and Herbert. Herbert, for all his proclaimed radicalism, is quick to remind Eddie that many of the rituals and artifacts (even his bizarre throwing walnuts at the cuckoo clock game -p.8) are "his", whilst Maurice pointedly reminds Eddie that he believes that the clock does not represent the only cuckoo in "his" house (p.11). Eddie is even reduced to acting as a bouncer for the mansion, ejecting Wheeler, the petty criminal who arrives to blackmail Herbert (p.20, pp.30-36). Jane's championing of Eddie arises largely from her self appointed role as an "angry psychiatrist" who bullies Herbert and Maurice, ironically as middle class exploiters, as much as Eddie (pp.16-17). Her relationship arises from her psychological peculiarities, whereby, as Maurice remarks, she deals far better with those who are afflicted than those who are well (p.37). The problem is that she is surrounded by the unafflicted, and it is from this paradox that her anger derives. As the massive, inexplicable events of the final act overtake the characters of Duck Song, what becomes apparent is that Mercer has, in Jane, as well as the

other characters of the play, set up a group of archetypal figures of social conflict in a private home, yet no conflict transpires, since there are no grounds for one. As the pre-rational cataclysm submerges them, they become an allegory for the state of the liberal world, falling back upon psychological disorder and neurosis as an escape. Jane is perhaps the most striking example of liberal paralysis in the play, for as she reaches her moment of climactic self-revelation, she reverts completely to the bourgeois ideology she professes to despise, remarking to Eddie:

I want to get married. I want an actual certificate
of marriage. I want a house. I want children.
I want to give and enjoy it. Be loved. Love.
Rock the cradle. Stir the soup. Attractive
clothes. Keep my looks. Exist for you. Believe
what you believe. Accept what you accept. *(pause)*
I've denied myself. I want to be the most
traditional sort of woman imaginable. I want to
be protected...and indulged...and cossetted. *(pause)*
In some remote place. Yes. An island. A mountain.
A beach. *(pause)* These longings! (p.74)

Although completely dissimilar ideologically from Marion, Jane occupies an identical position in the social hierarchy, and conducts her private affairs in very much the same manner. She, like Marion, is obsessed with the idea of being quite conventionally loved, and as the speech quoted above indicates, by her use of the term "I want" (a cry which also characterises her desire of motherly love from Eleanor, who she "wants" to feel guilty about her abandonment of her as a baby - she murders her mother when Eleanor doesn't comply - pp.56-58), she desires

love on her own terms, and in a manner suggestive of ruthless consumerism.

Henry Livings also revises his idea of the meritocrat in This Jockey Drives Late Nights (1972).⁵⁵ Annie, like Marion, but unlike Jane and Claire, is of lower middle class stock. There is no question of her worthiness amongst the other female meritocrats of this group. She is certainly hardworking, and represents a managerial technique which works partly by cajolery and partly by threat. She is cool and single-minded enough to dispose of her husband for his money, yet her reason for doing so is that she is smitten with a young driver who works for their taxi firm. She is able to turn concrete, public and political situations to her advantage, yet she can only display helplessness as Nick, her lover, attempts to turn her out of her home (where the play primarily takes place, the home being also the headquarters of the company) having started an affair with her stepdaughter, Marion (pp.62-64). What is stressed by the play is the capacity of events to have a logic of their own, determining entirely the behaviour of Annie, who, constrained by the intangible of infatuation, is unable to act within the political world to stave off her demise. She is able to manipulate Nick quite smoothly into murdering her husband, but is unable, because of her love for him, to control him afterwards, so that his confession to the police brings them both down.

In The Sea,⁵⁶ (1973), Edward Bond returns once again to the history of the English, with the setting this time Edwardian, rather than Victorian, England. It is true that Mrs. Rafi, the dominating character of the seaside village of the play's location, has as much in common with the upper-class

meritocrat stereotype typified by Cregan's Mrs. Carnnock of Three Men for Colverton, as with the modern female managerial figures discussed here, but with his historically distanced technique, Bond has much to say about the nature of management through this character. Two points set The Sea apart from Bond's earlier "historical" black comedies, Narrow Road to the Deep North⁵⁷ and Early Morning (both 1968). Firstly, the earlier plays are peopled by outrageous comic grotesques who are propelled by basic urges for sex and power, reflections of both history and the present who could not possibly have existed in the "real" world of the audience's collective mind. The Sea, on the other hand, presents character and comedy which is less reliant upon grotesquerie, and more upon dark comic irony, where events (such as the firing of the guns at Colin's funeral - p.153) rather than people conspire to destroy the lives of the characters. Aside from a single foray into anachronism in Hatch's belief in flying saucers, the play amounts almost to social realism. The audience is left with the view that the play could very nearly be a reconstruction of a past event, an impression which could not possibly be carried away from Bond's earlier "history" plays. Secondly, the character of Mrs. Rafi, who parallels the characters of Victoria and Georgina in the earlier plays, is basically that of a trapped woman, as much defined by the social restrictions which she polices as is her community. She seems to have no more aim in life than to play her allotted role. Mrs. Rafi explains herself to Rose and Willy with an impressive speech about the importance of her domineering presence to the community, but ends, pathetically, with : "But that's a terrible state in which to move towards the end of your life: to have no love. Has anything been worthwhile?

No. I've thrown my life away" (pp.160-161). Rose urges Willy not to feel sorry for Mrs. Rafi, "the town's full of her cripples. They're the ones she's nicest to" (p.162), but she is certainly a sad character, if not a sympathetic one.

The crucial difference between the women of this era, and the female managers of the mid-sixties seems to be that figures such as Marion and Annie have been given far more complex emotional needs. Nevertheless all of the figures mentioned above attempt in some way to buy love from those around them. In the face of complex emotional interdependence the possibility of individual ^{ti}initiative, such as that exercised by earlier figures, is crushed, and these ruthless figures are humanised, yet made more ruthless by the deterministic process that unfolds around them. Wandor remarks that in her reading, the locations of British dramas of the period immediately preceding the abolition of theatrical censorship in 1968 were primarily domestic⁵⁸, whereas in the seventies dramas involving female figures come increasingly to be set in the public arena.⁵⁹ My own reading of the period comes to quite the opposite conclusion. Wandor commentates extensively on two of the plays I have chosen for my own chapter, The Killing of Sister George and Owners, to illustrate the point that plays about women are shifted into the public domain in the seventies, but it must be remembered that Marcus's play takes place in a private flat overlooking BBC House, and is entirely motivated by the sacking of a radio actor from her position in the corporation, whereas Owners, although it takes place in a number of locations, public and private, deals with the finding of a place to live by a couple who are harrassed by a woman who is profoundly in love with the male of the couple. This is in

itself a stark contrast to The Killing of Sister George, for although once again, the splitting up of a couple is a sub-plot, Alice is merely a bargaining chip in Mercy's war against George, there being no possibility in Marcus's presentation of the technocrat, that she is capable of any personal emotion at all. The personal theme of Owners is made a special case by Wandor, who remarks that:

Owners is reminiscent of many plays of the fifties and sixties in that it seeks to portray the way ideas and social values impinge upon interpersonal relationships. In content Owners harks back to the earlier decades, but in form it exploits the stage freedoms of the seventies.⁶⁰

I am not sure that the impingement of ideas and social values upon interpersonal relations is not more pronounced, rather than less, in the seventies, but discussing this brings us onto our next section.

I began my examination of the rise of the meritocracy with an account of the creation of the political image of the meritocrat by Wilson's Labour Party, and it is to this political grouping we must inevitably return in sealing the fate of the liberal meritocrat of the sixties. By the time of the Wilson government's fall in 1970, even Wilson himself, it has been hinted, had become disillusioned (if he had ever really believed it) with the idea. He endorsed Labour's new-found anti-intellectualism and anti-elitism, even to the point of agreeing to the abolition of Grammar schools, which he had originally

claimed would be abandoned "over my dead body".⁶¹ At the controversial Labour Party Conference of 1971, Wilson attacked the "intellectual wing" of the party, and by so doing was able to continue his long political juggling act at the top of the heap.⁶² The party itself was in a profound state of intellectual malaise, and it was the party conference mentioned above which brought to the fore, more than any other in Wilson's opposition years, a public display of utter disenchantment with Wilson's leadership and with the divisions created within the party during the administrations of 1964 to 1970. Labour had become enormously unpopular, even with its own supporters, as is evinced by the TUC's request in February 1971 for Labour politicians not to speak upon the same platform as its own delegates at their mass rally against the Industrial Relations Bill, for fear of creating division among the campaign's supporters.⁶³

The divisions within the party itself became manifest in the EEC debate, which was effectively opened in July 1971, when the NEC voted to make entry a conference issue. The party's right, led by Roy Jenkins, were infuriated, and the way was opened for an acrimonious debate during which shadow cabinet ministers would publicly attack one another, and Wilson would, not for the first time, nor the last, alter his position on the EEC, assailing explicitly Jenkins, William Rodgers and Roy Hattersley for opposing the mooted EEC referendum.⁶⁴ The party conference was predicted to be fraught with contentions and personal bitterness under these circumstances and proved to be just that, with questions raised about the future of Jenkins in particular.⁶⁵ A Guardian editorial during the conference expressed complete disgust with the party, claiming that a

Labour government would be no different from the Conservative government with regard to the current economic disasters of rising unemployment and inflation.⁶⁰ In the Daily Mirror, Woodrow Wyatt compared the Wilson administration of 1964 to 1970 with Attlee's of 1945 to 1951 and found it singularly wanting.⁶⁷ Although Wilson staved off the resignation of Jenkins and his frontbench supporters by promising no recrimination if they would simply vote against tory legislation on the EEC and nothing more, the conference was a debacle. From it, however, emerged a party which began to quite openly attack the idea of the professionals of the meritocracy as leaders of a reformed society. As part of a leftward move which also saw platform being forced to oppose a motion to nationalise banks, building societies and insurance companies⁶⁸, there came the attack upon the Grammar school meritocrats who had been idealised earlier. The party chairman, Ian Mikardo, for example, made a speech attacking the idea that the only difference between Labour and the Tories was "something to do with managerial efficiency and tinkering with the economy".⁶⁹

In October 1971, a fortnight after the party conference, then in February 1972, shortly before the widely predicted April resignation⁷⁰ of Jenkins and his cohorts in the shadow cabinet, came two plays which, in effect, replied to the quandary of Labour politics. Both were about disillusioned Labour MPs, and both discussed explicitly, exclusively and indeed incessantly the demise of the Labour Party. But Bennett's Getting On (1971)⁷¹ and Hare's The Great Exhibition (1972)⁷² were primarily, and at first glance paradoxically about the private lives of these two men. Both writers were at great pains to stress the political significance, and indeed the dark and

earnest intent of these plays, but both saw their play dismissed as light comedy. Hare remarked of his play:

The only political experience I had was believing passionately in the Labour Government of 1964, and watching that government sell everything down the river. So the play was about a disillusioned Labour MP.⁷³

Bennett was equally careful to stress the importance of his play's serious topical content, but saw his play cut, rewritten and turned into what largely amounted to a light comedy by its unlikely lead, Kenneth More.⁷⁴ The author vainly pointed to the play's topicality as a strength, pointing out that Getting On was not

what Geoffrey Grigson called "weeded of impermanence", a necessary condition apparently if a play or poem is to outlast its time. Topical references are out. Of course plays don't become timeless simply by weeding them of timely references any more than plays become serious by weeding them of jokes.⁷⁵

but eventually Bennett was a little insulted to receive the Evening Standard best comedy award for 1971⁷⁶, remarking in his acceptance speech:

To be given the award for Best Comedy is rather like taking great care and love nurturing your finest marrow but when you take it to the show you find you have won the prize for best cucumber.⁷⁷

Both plays are structured absolutely around their central figures, and draw identical conclusions about the particular form of egoism which afflicts them, and *implicitly*, the Labour movement.

In The Great Exhibition, Hare places considerable emphasis on the "new man" status of Charlie Hammett, the "half bald, ugly, slug-like pedantic thirty-three-year-old" MP (p.11), as indeed he does of all the characters in the play. Hammett himself is a product of the high point of the Labour Government's "professional" period, "swept in" as he puts it, "on the Labour landslide of '66. A lot of creepy-crawlies swept in on the froth of that wave" (p.48). His professionalism is indeed a purely careerist act, since he confirms that "I went into socialism like other people go into medicine or law. It was a profession" (p.30). So too, Abel is a middle class careerist who reveals that he has changed his identity, or at least his name, which was, almost inevitably, formerly Wilson (p.12). He frequently refers to his own professionalism by dint of his career as a private detective, a job whose role he has assumed completely, becoming a kind of Mickie Spillane figure- Hare would use this figure again in Knuckle. But his "technological" skills are confined to the use of cameras and tape recorders at sordid assignations between errant spouses and their lovers. Of his unchallenging "discovery" of the infidelity of Maud, Hammett's wife, upstairs in their bedroom, he remarks "The white heat of my professional know how had barely begun to glow before - well - he's got his organ out and it's called proof conclusive" (p.31). His use of a Wilsonian phrase in a bathetic context is not coincidental, nor is the farcical disguise as a fellow Labour MP when he is caught conspiring with Hammett (p.47). Most of all, like Wilson, he is finally revealed to sustain his advantages by playing off a group of dissenting factions, one against another, since it is shown that he has in fact been employed by all three of the

war^ring parties of Hammett, Maud and Catriona, an old public school friend of Maud's who has an affair with Hammett after (failing to recognise her) he exposes himself to her on Clapham Common.

The current crisis in the Labour Party is referred to by Hammett who speaks of the "vigorous reassessment" which is under way in the party (p.17). His own response is to abdicate all responsibility, cutting himself off from the party he had never really supported in any case. His approach to socialism has always been the sixties "quality of life" idea, which disgusts even the cynical Abel (p.33). But Hammett can only approach politics, as the play repeatedly informs us, as a form of performance. As Bull points out,⁷⁸ Hammett's remark that the "theatre put to good use could be the most sophisticated possible means of ignoring what people are actually like" (p.23) is an ironic reflection upon his own profession. Hare does not leave it at this, packing his dialogue with aphorisms such as "Socialism's a talent, like acting" (p.42) and Maud's remarks about her former enjoyment of a relationship with someone outside her profession (the theatre), but who is "no longer so far outside the theatre" (p.20). It is not surprising that Hammett is briefly repoliticised by his act of indecent exposure to Catriona, which provides the farcical impetus for the rest of the play, since flashing, too, is compared to politics. Hammett comments, after his act, that "I fear tonight's the beginning of my parliamentary career, not the end. The idea was - back there - if I can do this I can do anything" (p.52). But even so, he has been accused by Catriona of "acting the part" with a flawless disguise, too much like the stereotype (p.51), whilst Abel, who later reveals that he too had witnessed the flash

whilst in the employment of Maud, comments that it "looked like some kind of opinion poll" (p.56).

Politics, says Hare, is like acting in a bad play, or flashing - it is a public act of self revelation which is largely performed for one's own enjoyment, and against the wishes of those to whom you exhibit. It is a valid enough point, especially as it applies to the Labour Party of 1972. Hammett's self-interested, eloquent guiltiness is very much of a piece with the image of the failed technocrat. It is not for nothing that Hare identifies Hammett as part of a specific generation of Labour MPs, and notes his self-interest, even in his announcement of his resignation to Clough, the ex Home Secretary:

HAMMETT: Even if the system worked, which it doesn't, would it be worth it? Not for the people, but for us would it be worth it?

CLOUGH: That's not important.

HAMMETT: Of course it's important. It's the only thing that is (p.28)

Clough is, as Charlie himself points out, of a different generation to himself, but as an older style Labour politician who is also misanthropic, disillusioned and pragmatic, Clough does at least have a basic sense of public service, something which from Hammett and the other middle-class liberals of the play, is completely absent.

Getting On features a disillusioned Labour MP whose physical description is similar in content, if not in tone, to Hare's " *He [George Oliver] is a man of about forty, rather glamorous once, now a bit florid, worn, running to fat. He wears quite good clothes but they don't hang well on him.*" (p.103). His age puts him firmly within

the same generation as Hammett, as does his background - once again he is a grammar school boy, and like Hammett, he has the meritocratic nature of his background questioned by his wife, Polly:

POLLY: State education? You?

GEORGE: I went to a Grammar school (*Exits*)

POLLY: Grammar school! Founded about 44BC and wearing long blue frocks, some Grammar school!

(p.115)

The education of both George Oliver and Charlie Hammett raises the question, which needed to be asked, of whether current Prime Minister Ted's scholarship to Chatham House, or Harold's to the Wirrall, made them any more fit to govern than Sir Alec's schooling at Eton. George is in the middle, in the scene just quoted, of buying his child a public school uniform, or at least perfunctorily opposing such a purchase for his young son who is not a potential meritocrat, being academically undistinguished, before finally agreeing to the move in the second act. George's best friend is a Conservative MP, Brian, and this is not surprising, since upon his introduction to the household, Geoff, a working class youth who is the lover of Polly, mistakes him for a conservative (p.108). His own eldest son, Andy, jokes about how at his best, George looks like a young conservative (p.151), and Enid, his esteemed mother-in-law, claims that he is "more right-wing every day" (p.133). George's politics are those of his leader, for although he makes an impassioned speech about Attlee's creation of the welfare state to his son (pp.155-56) he later reveals that he had not in fact been interested in politics until the Suez crisis (p.180), putting him firmly within the political period of Labour's failures, not its successes.

George is basically overwhelmed by his own misanthropy, which puts him, according to the other characters, more in the Tory camp than Labour's:

POLLY: George's trouble is....are you eating

(Brian shakes his head) ...he's a

socialist but he doesn't like people...

BRIAN: Nor do I, much.

POLLY: You're a conservative. You don't have to.

(p.119)

George's political life at the time of the play revolves around a speech he is to make for television about the wastage, in human and material terms, which affects society. A serious and indeed commendable topic, but another of the many anomalies of his political belief. His own home is littered with consumer items and trendy rubbish:

GEOFF: It's nice [George's family home]. You've got lots of nice things.

GEORGE: We have so many things that by the law of averages some of them must be nice. (p.105)

George practises his speech as he debates his son's public school education, and is quite clearly indifferent to what he says (pp.113-115), whilst Polly, his only audience, is not listening. Neither when his speech is finally broadcast does anyone pay the slightest attention - Andy switches off the television mid way through (pp.159-160). George is living proof of the wastage of his society and Geoff is the walk-on victim of the family's ideological contradictions, acknowledging his own role as servant to the family (p.140), and eventually leaving their service having performed sexual favours for both Polly and Brian, who is acknowledged as part of the family circle in spite

of his Toryism, or perhaps because of it. As Geoff leaves in bitterness everyone, for different, but equally self-interested reasons, loses their appetite for the Indian carry-out that has been ordered. Andy asks his father if anyone is eating, and upon his decline, "*He drops in the cartons with a thud and a shrug. This dumping must be quite explicit and pointed, dumping several cartons distinctly and separately, opening the waste bin with his foot each time* " (p.179) It is a cleverly conceived, contemporary and appropriately mundane image of waste as it relates to the demand-fed consumer family.

Both Hammett and Oliver suffer from a complete inability to relate to the Labour party's natural constituency, the working class. George Oliver describes the plight of his local constituents to Geoff in explaining his activity as an MP at surgery, but what emerges is not his compassion, but through Polly's interjection, his perverse form of "professionalism":

GEORGE: The council's demolishing their houses, the ministry's withholding their pension, benefits, compensation, ejection. The load of bitterness and despair that people hump about with them you'd be amazed.

POLLY: It's a very poor constituency. He was lucky to get it... I mean... (p.108)

In an angry speech to Andy, George remarks that most people are too stupid to appreciate social change and must be "led by the nose", to any programme of social reform, revealing further his utter contempt for them:

ANDY: You're wrong, George. You are wrong. Look, each person is special...

GEORGE: Special. On the Kingston by-pass on a

Sunday afternoon show me how special.

ANDY: Not if you like them...if you try and...

GEORGE: Liking them doesn't feed them, and liking doesn't house them. Liking them doesn't stop them turning the place into a midden or turning out their stinking, fuming tin boxes, Sunday by Sunday, perambulating their boredom about the countryside. (p.154-155)

The final line of the play is the revelation that George, who had earlier denounced as mad a West Indian constituent who had complained that her neighbours were poisoning her cats, had been wrong, that in fact it had been her neighbours who were mad, and that the cats had been poisoned (p.183). The curtain is a final irony, a demonstration of George's complete alienation from the people he despises and claims to represent.

Charlie Hammett formerly laboured under the misapprehension that the working classes as represented in his Sunderland seat where "They'd vote in Madame de Pompadour as long as she stood on the Labour ticket" (p.28), were in some way "more real" than himself, but this, Maud comments, precedes from the belief that "the stupider, drunker and more illiterate you are, the nearer you are to being a real person" (p.25). Maud later reflects upon Hammett's failure to assimilate with his constituency, being unable to conceal his accent or consume their beer. "The week-end felt like a penance for the life we led elsewhere. I never felt it necessary" (p.41). At the end of the play, Maud undergoes a brief conversion to socialism, as she attempts to take over Charlie's constituency, but when it is realised that she has been beaten to selection by the local secretary of the Engineers Union⁷⁹ she joins Charlie in abusing

the "bloody workers" who have never really related to them (p.81).

A good pointer to what both of these plays are about is the contemporary critical perception of them. In both cases, the critics tended to retreat from the politicality of the plays, and compliment instead their comic invention. Of The Great Exhibition, Billington speaks of Hare's "blanket condemnation of off-the-peg cynicism" but claims that the play is "saved" by his "bilious wit" and "spry sense of farce".⁸⁰ Barber writes "David Hare writes as a cartoonist draws. A sullen character, a glum situation and he is away. Everything turns into light, shocking comedy."⁸¹ Whilst Shulman praises Bennett's "observation of the ludicrous posturing of Hampstead middle class fauna", he complains that his "characters seem to be mouthpieces for a series of articles in a Sunday newspaper supplement" and comes to the conclusion that the fun of the play, rather than its political content, is its main asset.⁸² Barber speaks of Bennett's play as overlong and sentimental, but enjoys the jokes⁸³, whilst Lewis speaks of its amusing grumbling, but adds that "nothing but grumbling is hardly an adequate response to life".⁸⁴ All of the critics acknowledge the existence of personal themes in Getting On, but do not attach any real importance to the play's domesticity. The one exception is Billington, who in a separate article from his reviews⁸⁵, says of Getting On:

A lot of people thought that its hero, a Labour
Politician, might as well have been a Tory: But
the whole point was that a man can be progressive
in his politics but conservative in his lifestyle.⁸⁶

But it would seem to me that both plays make the point that it

is impossible to be conservative at home and radical in public, since the two lifestyles are one, inextricably linked political position. This is illustrated by the multiversity of their titles. George is getting on in age and getting on in the party (he aims for a minor ministerial post - p.182) but this prevents him from getting on with his family, particularly his radical son. Finally George ignores his doubts and decides to get on with his conservative life. The exhibition of Hare's title is of course an ironic reference to a Victorian institution in a radical life, but also an allusion to the "private" form of exhibition he practices on Clapham Common, and the public kind of politics and acting. Although speaking from politically disparate viewpoints, both writers are concerned with mocking the artificial division between public and private life. Bennett remarks that his play, in a sentence:

is an account of a middle aged Labour MP, George Oliver, so self absorbed that he remains blind to the fact that his wife is having an affair with the handyman, his mother-in-law is dying, his son is getting ready to leave home, his best friend thinks him a fool and that to everyone who comes into contact with him, he is a self-esteeming joke.⁸⁸

In essence, the play is less about the politician than the paradoxes he sets up in his "private" life. Oliver is a raging egoist, comparing himself to Gulliver, as does Hammett (p.58), when he is in fact as Lilliputian as those he despises. He never misses an opportunity to turn the experience of those around him into a political tirade, pigeon-holing his son's alternative lifestyle inaccurately as "mawkish maoism" (p.154), and making

a political statement of Brian's victimising by a blackmailer when everyone can see that it would ruin Brian's chances of a return to his family firm if his homosexuality were to be publically revealed (pp.175-179). He sees Geoff as an example of a social phenomenon, incurring the wrath of his lovers Polly and Brian, for so doing (p.170), because he can relate to no one outside of himself as anything but a political dilemma. The play really amounts to a domestic melodrama, with George's loss of his wife's and best friend's affection, as well as that of his son, bound up inextricably with his political convictions.

The insuperability of Hammett's public and private lives is also the central theme of The Great Exhibition. Hare goes as far as dividing his play into two acts, public life and private life, each ironically more concerned with their opposites. In the first "public" act, we see Hammett, having given up his seat, cutting himself off from the "public" world outside altogether, seeing no one outside his home for six weeks, developing a device which incinerates his mail as it comes through his letterbox, destroying his telephone, and concentrating upon building a life as a "wife" (p.17) to Maud. She ruins his plan by announcing her affair with Jerry, the Australian hippy and merchant banker, and the end of their marriage. The "private" act begins with Hammett planning to launch back into public life, having started a relationship (during the "public" act, of course), with Catriona, which by mutual agreement, has turned out to be a "disaster" (p.60). Later, it is in fact revealed that his "private" life with Catriona is, in any case, a public enterprise, since she has in fact been attempting to influence him to join the Conservatives as a public relations coup on behalf of her father, the chairman

of the CBI (pp.74-75). Catriona's own purpose in having an affair with Hammett is also nothing to do with Charlie himself, since her purpose is to reintroduce herself to Maud, with whom she is infatuated. Hammett's recollected courtship of Maud is indicative of the same kind of confusion as George's about the capacity to relate to people on the level of anything but "issues". Hammett claims to have courted Maud with a series of public addresses, culminating in his proposal during the public event of the 1962 Aldermaston march, "my actual proposal", he remembers, "drew heavily on Das Kapital" (p.33). Like George, Marion and the rest of the meritocrats of the plays of the early seventies, Charlie is forced to substitute theoretical positions for genuine human contact, and eventually comes to the realisation that "Nothing I've ever done has been private" (p.73).

Each of the central characters of both Bennett's and Hare's plays dominate proceedings. Like Marion, perhaps even more so, these characters are mouthpieces of political discontent, off whom the other characters bounce, having been trotted on for one farcical confrontation after another. These two plays are both farces and explorations of highly developed psychologies, a very difficult stylistic combination. Relationships, as with Owners, have far more to do with power than lust. One need only contrast the farcical scene, typically built around primal motivation, in Eh?, where Betty's desire for consummation of her marriage is continually foiled by Val's desire to look after his drugs with the scenes of farcical "debauchery" in The Great Exhibition, to point up the difference. In The Great Exhibition, desires for sex and drugs are both easily fulfillable, but unfulfilled. Maud has an

"affair" with Jerry, but he is incapable of sexual intercourse (pp.31-34), whilst Hammett's relations with Catriona are entirely unsatisfactory, "like showing a pebble to a cement grinder" as Maud puts it, but there is no frustration at these things. Each relationship is, after all, geared in no way toward fulfilment of lust, but rather power of one character over another. Similarly, in Getting On, the affair of Polly with Geoff is disappointing (p.165), but there is no humour centred around frustration, for this is not the point. Just as the middle class couples in The Great Exhibition and Owners are childless, so George and Polly may as well be, for they relate on no level to any of their children, speaking of them as if they were someone else's. So too, the "privateness" of these two "public" plays is emphasised by their settings, both having conventional drawing room backdrops from which they do not venture, with the exception of the brief but important flashing scene in The Great Exhibition, which however much it may tip a nod to the Portable Theatre tradition from which Hare had recently departed, does not amount to any great opening out, or a disruption of the domestic locale.

In all, on the subject of the meritocrats of the sixties as portrayed in the seventies, the black comic dramatist has become still more pessimistic about the prospects of human progress within its social spectrum than in the previous decade. By switching the focus of the plays away from the victims of managerial figures and onto the managerial figures themselves and making plays about the "uniquely subtle psychology" of one

character (the quote is David Hare's about the character of Hammett) who is emotionally barren, without the capacity for love or the ability to make himself or herself loved, there is produced a group of plays of unremitting pessimism. Gone is the hope of redemption by mystical or pre-rational experience advocated by the writers of the sixties. Little mention is made of these themes by the writers of the seventies, and when they are mentioned, as when Marion asks Alec whether his refusal to be tempted by material objects into cooperating with her wishes is a "mystical experience", he simply says "no", and there is the end of it (p.53). In the one play where mystical experience does overtake the characters, Duck Song, it is a phenomenon entirely beyond their comprehensions, and equally hostile to all, not discriminating between rank and social status, as is the case in earlier black comedies.

Nor is there any hope of the downtrodden but anarchic worker scoring points off authority but still surviving within the system, characterised by Val in Eh? Attempts to distance oneself from the social structures and institutions of society by forcing them to remain dependent upon the dissenter all fail. In The Sea, Evans is the only character who attempts a genuine alternative lifestyle, and as a result is a total outcast, an alcoholic who lives in a shack on the beach, despised by his community. At the end of the play, it would seem that Willy and Rose are also liable to follow his lifestyle, yet he seems to advise them not to do so (pp.168-169). Dissent is simply an encumbrance to the new society - when Hammett remarks to Clough, of his leaving the party, "I thought you'd be sorry if I wanted to go", the ex Home Secretary replies "It's not a club anymore. You're free. No reason why dissidents shouldn't drop away"

(p.29). Dissidence is not possible with the new economic realities of Britain, and the playwrights' acknowledgement of widespread poverty and mass unemployment is part of this. Characters such as Val Brose, Ray Buchanan or even June Buckeridge would no longer be guaranteed a job, and so the image of the new form of "servant for people who aren't used to having servants" as Geoff describes himself in Getting On, emerges to replace them in the portrayed social structure. Lisa becomes a childbearer for a loveless couple, whilst the unemployed Eddie Bone is an odd job man and bouncer, entirely dependent on the good will of the family who house him, and in This Jockey Drives Late Nights, Nick becomes a murderer for his boss and lover Annie. All of these servants have sexual relations with their Owners, but none are able to fulfil the emotional needs for which they are employed, since lust, the primary motivational force in the earlier plays, is replaced by a desire for emotional stability which is precluded by the political conditions of each play's location. The fact that the managerial professionals of these plays are from different sides of the political spectrum is irrelevant to this issue. Hatch, the desperate wage slave to Mrs. Rafi, whose breakdown is brought about by her simply withholding payment for a haberdashery order, is in no worse position than Eddie Bone, whose mistress is not a Tory but a paralysed liberal, because both are servants of the same social hierarchy.

When one considers the stylistic choices made in the portrayal of this new professional class in the first and second part of our era, it is instructive to contrast Orton's The Good and Faithful Servant with Hare's The Great Exhibition. One sees that Orton, normally a farceur to the last, writes a play which,

as I have said, is his least farcical, whilst Hare writes the most pure farce that he has yet produced. Few of the plays in our period are entirely free of farcical elements, but plays such as The Good and Faithful Servant, The Killing of Sister George, and Belcher's Luck show an unusual reluctance to employ the form. Owners, Getting On and The Great Exhibition, on the other hand are virtually pure farce. Perhaps part of the answer to the question of stylistic choice lies in the already mentioned clear-cut nature of the conflicts between the characters of the plays of the earlier period. Farce is after all, from the *commedia dell'arte* all the way to What The Butler Saw, a great leveller, the one genre which generally guarantees that the authority figure will be humiliated and brought lower than the lowest during the feast of fools of the play. Where a dramatist is portraying a clear-cut conflict between members of a hierarchy, it would be counterproductive to invert this social hierarchy, demonstrating its falseness. Certainly, Marcus and Orton are able to show their professionally minded protagonists backpedalling occasionally, but to humiliate them completely would be counter to the purpose of displaying the absolute and autocratic control which Mrs. Vealfoy and Mrs. Mercy exercise over the other characters. There must be none of the fudging of traditional roles which occurs in farce for playwrights portraying such conflicts of absolute values.

Hare, Bennet and Churchill, on the other hand, are dealing with far more complex situations, since as we have seen, although these characters are also clearly divided by social status, they are also interdependent and deterministically controlled. On the face of it, then, there is more scope for the levelling effect of farce. There is also the drawing room

nature of Bennett's and Hare's plays, and the generally more "private" emphasis, which make them suitable for farcical treatment. "No wonder then", the casual observer might say, "that they chose farce" to convey a different emphasis on the same theme (the meritocracy) as the earlier group of writers.

For all that, though, all three of the plays discussed above are "fake farces", in that they seem to employ all of the techniques of farce, but to entirely subversive effect. The Great Exhibition, for example, relies for much of its dramatic impetus upon the need to conceal one's affairs from others, yet the concealment proves in the end to be a simple going-through of the motions - by the agent of Abel, each of the characters proves to be fully aware of the affairs of the others, and Hammett himself acknowledges that everyone has known everything about everyone from the start (p.75). All of Abel's hiding in cupboards, of the mechanical timing of the visits of Clough and Jerry at parallel points of each act, of the farcical paraphernalia of chases and other conventional business of farce are to no avail, rendered pointless by the fact that the characters do not care one way or the other about each other's affairs. They are not, as I have said, motivated by such basic urges as money and lust as are farce characters generally, and the outrageous A Flea in Her Ear style coincidence which motivates the entire second act, that of Hammett's meeting his wife's old girlfriend while out exposing himself in public, is not a conventional farcical coincidence at all, but a prearranged meeting set up by the Chairman of the CBI. Similarly, minor farcical episodes, such as that where Hammett, his living room full of marijuana smoke, opens the door to the (until recently) Home Secretary, is quickly undercut by the

fact that Clough recognises the smell of pot, but does not care (p.30). The apparently farcical Owners is in the end a farce in which the schemer, Marion, has really no need of scheming at all, since she has such unassailable power over the characters around her that their knowledge of her power games in no way alters their position with regard to her. Thus the passage quoted above, where Marion's attempts to conceal the fact that Worsley works for her is discovered by Lisa, so far from being compromised, she simply switches to open confrontation without any loss of face. Similarly in Getting On, the characters attempt to conceal their activities from one another, yet when their affairs are discovered, as when Polly and Brian find that they have both been using Geoff sexually, it makes no difference. By the end of the play, Polly's affair with Geoff is known by all of the characters except George, and Bennett has gone to great lengths to show that George is so self obsessed that there is no imminent danger of discovery to escalate farcical tensions. Farce in the hands of these writers is a comic device, but one which has been carefully disconnected from its sense of moral hierarchy, which would not assist the thematic purposes of these writers.

FOOTNOTES

1. I should perhaps remark that the term "meritocrat" was a recent invention, having come from Michael Young's satirical essay, which portrayed a nightmare society, with the untalented of all classes enslaved to the talented, and the world dominated by such political groupings as "the technician's party". It is odd that the term should so quickly lose its satiric flavour and become an accepted term.
- 1a. B. Blake, "The Family Background of 'Harold Wilson'", R. Rose (ed), Studies in British Politics (London, 1966), pp.64-70.
2. Shirley Williams, "The Class Barriers Crumble", Spectator, 8 April, 1966.
3. "The Quiet Revolution", Spectator, 30 July, 1965.
4. J. Campbell, op.cit. p.78.
5. K. Young, op.cit. p.223.
6. Bernard Levin, op.cit. pp.179-180.
7. A. Sampson, op.cit. p.115.
8. Ibid. pp.364-65.
9. S. Eveling, The Lunatic, The Secret Sportsman and The Woman Next Door, and Vibrations (London, 1970)
10. P. Johnson, "Shadow and Spectre at No. 10", New Statesman, 9 Oct. 1970.
11. Raymond Williams, The Long Revolution (Harmondsworth, 1961), p.333.
12. "Our Shirley in Exile"? R.W. Johnson, op.cit. pp.208-209.
13. Antony Jay, Corporation Man (London, 1972)
14. Ibid. pp.127-128.
15. Graham Cleverley, Managers and Magic (Harmondsworth, 1971)
16. Ibid. pp.128-140.
17. F. Marcus, The Killing of Sister George (London, 1965)
18. M. Wandor, Look Back in Gender (London, 1987), pp.62-67.
19. Ibid. p.63.
20. B. Levin, op.cit. pp.329-32.
21. A.A. De Vitis, "Frank Marcus", ^SWentrub, Dictionary of Literary Biography 13 (1982), (Detroit, p.330)
22. Wandor, op.cit. pp.62-66.
23. H. Livings, Eh? (London, 1965)
- 23a. J. Saunders, A Scent of Flowers (London, 1965)

24. D. Cregan, Transcending and The Dancers (London, 1967)
25. Stanley Eveling, op.cit.
26. C.W.E. Bigsby, Joe Orton (London, 1982) p.37.
27. M. Charney, Joe Orton (London, 1984), pp.58-62.
28. S. Shepherd, "Edna's Last Stand, or Joe Orton's dialectic of Entertainment", Renaissance and Modern Studies, 22, 1978, pp.87-110.
29. M. Charney, op.cit., p.61.
30. J.C. Trewin (ed), Plays of The Year 30 (London, 1966), pp.105-214.
31. Numerous contemporary accounts of this affair appear in periodicals and the press, but for the most concise accounts, see Samson (op.cit.) pp.558-61 and Levin (op.cit.) pp.154-55.
32. S. Eveling, The Lunatic, The Secret Sportsman and The Woman Next Door and Vibrations (London, 1970), pp.73-142.
33. Sir Leon Bagrit, The Age of Automation (Harmondsworth, 1966)
34. Ibid. pp.78-90.
35. Ibid. pp.11-23.
36. Ibid. p.23.
37. Ibid. p.40.
38. Ibid. p.45.
39. Ibid. p.64.
40. Ibid. pp.81-82.
41. Ibid. p.80.
42. B. De Jouvenel, "The Ugly Face of Progress", The Spectator, ²⁴April 1964.
43. "The Shadow of Technology", New Statesman, 31 March, 1967
44. "Easter, 1967", The Listener, ²³March, 1967.
45. Victor Feather, The Essence of Trade Unionism (London, 1963), pp.123-127.
46. D. Frost and A. Jay, To England With Love (London, 1967), pp.85-125.
47. Ibid. pp.90-91.
48. C. Chambers and M. Prior, op.cit. pp.38-40.
49. Wandor, op.cit. pp.89-90.

50. C. Churchill, Owners (London, 1973)
51. H. Keyssar, Feminist Theatre: An Introduction to Plays of Contemporary British and American Women (Houndmills, 1984)
52. Ibid. p.83.
53. Wandor and Keyssar (op.cit.) both seem to be under the impression that it is Lisa and Alec's baby who is killed. Perhaps in a later edition the text is revised, but certainly in my edition, the first published after the original production, this is not the case.
54. D. Mercer, Duck Song (London, 1974)
55. H.Livings, This Jockey Drives Late Nights (London, 1972)
56. Edward Bond, Plays: Two (London, 1978), pp.103-170.
57. Ibid. pp.171-226.
58. Wandor, op.cit. pp.68-69.
59. Ibid. pp.151-53.
60. Ibid. p.152.
61. Nora Beloff, op.cit. pp.199-200.
62. G. Lohead, "The Sound of Labour", Daily Express, 6 Oct. , 1971.
63. Tariq Ali, The Coming British Revolution (London, 1972), p.61.
64. J. Campbell, op.cit. pp.139-42.
65. W. Sendell and W. Partington, "Knives Out for Labour", Daily Express, 4 Oct. 1971.
66. "The Alternative Society", Guardian, 6 Oct. 1971.
67. Woodrow Wyatt, "Wasted Years of Labour", Daily Mirror, 1 Oct. 1971.
68. D. Thomson, "Nationalise The Banks", Daily Mirror, 9 Oct. 1971.
69. J. Beecroft, "The Thoughts of Chairman Mik", Daily Mirror, 5 Oct. 1971.
70. D. Butler and D. Kavanagh, The British General Election of February 1974 (London, 1974), p.20.
71. Alan Bennett, op.cit. pp.97-185.
72. David Hare, The Great Exhibition (London, 1972)
73. Bull, op.cit. p.65.
74. Author's Introduction, Forty Years On and Other Plays pp.12-19.
75. Ibid. p.19.

76. M. Owen, "Comedy is a Serious Business", C. Wintour et.al., Celebration: 25 Years of British Theatre (London, 1980), pp.71-80.
77. Ibid. p.75.
78. Bull, op.cit. pp.66-67.
79. Significant, because then it was the Union of Hugh Scanlon, the left-wing and working-class scourge of the Labour Party, who had enjoyed particular prominence at the 1971 party conference, and indeed from the late sixties until the end of our period, as one of the leaders of the revived left wing which attacked figures such as the one portrayed by Hare.
80. M. Billington, "Hare Play", Guardian, 29 Feb. 1972.
81. J. Barber, "MPs Home Troubles made into comedy", Daily Telegraph, 29 Feb. 1972.
82. M. Shulman, "Theatre", Evening Standard, 15 Oct. 1971.
83. J. Barber, "End of Tether MP and Bored Young Wife", Daily Telegraph, 15 Oct. 1971.
84. P. Lewis, "Something to Grumble About", Daily Mail, 5 Oct. 1971.
85. M. Billington, "Getting On", Guardian, 15 Oct. 1971, makes a comparison with Bennett's Forty Years On, but does not really sufficiently address the later play.
86. M. Billington, "1989 And All That", Guardian, 25 Oct. 1971.
87. Bennett, op.cit. pp.12-13.

CHAPTER FIVE

DOCTORS AND POLICEMEN

"It is time to think clearly and give our police a role in which we can help and not obstruct them".

B. Whittaker, The Police, (Harmondsworth, 1964), p.171.

In the period beginning roughly at the close of the Macmillan era, there came a crisis of public confidence in a number of the welfare state's most trusted institutions. In particular, the medical profession and the police came under a scrutiny to which they had not previously been accustomed. Both of these institutions were seen to be subject to serious corruption and misconduct on a scale which proved to be much wider than might have been expected. This chapter will concentrate upon the response of the dramatists of this era to these crises, with emphasis upon the historical specificity of their portrayal of medical and policing issues, and the unity of this response, both in terms of attitude to subject and technical approach. In their portrayal of the medical profession, there is not only a unanimity of satiric intent with regard to the major issues of incompetence, sexual misconduct, mistreatment of the mentally ill, and corruption, but also in the technical approach (that of farce) and stage imagery amongst writers of dark comedy. There was also a considerable focus of attention upon the issue of abortion. The first section of the chapter, which will deal with these medical issues, will culminate in an examination of Peter Nichols' The National Health, or Nurse Norton's Affair (1969), a play which brings together most of the medical ethic subjects mentioned earlier, as well as providing an example of how the dark comedians used farce and imagery of bodily corruption (to parallel the inherent spiritual corruption of the world of the play) as satiric vehicles of a quite specific set of attitudes to contemporary events in medicine.

The discussion of police misconduct in the period under consideration is divided into two distinct eras. In the first

part of our period, 1964 to 1967, there is some discussion of police in "black comedies", but very little serious criticism of police behaviour. There is, however, an exception even in this period. The year following November, 1963 saw a series of scandals within the police force which reached a peak with the Challenor affair, from June to November, 1964. Joe Orton's Loot (1965) seems to be a direct response to these events. The most damaging series of crises in twentieth-century police history occurred from 1968 to 1972 when a series of corruption scandals, particularly centering in Scotland Yard resulted in the arrest and prosecution of the most senior group of policemen ever to be sent to prison. There is a close historical parallel to these events in the change in the portrayal of policemen by the writers of black comedies. Several social issues are given attention. The perceived affinity between the police and their criminal quarry to which the scandals of the late sixties gave rise, provides the dramatists of the period with not only an abundance of material for satire, but also a ready-made dramatic metaphor, in the visual and verbal propinquity of policeman and criminal. The imagery involving religious allusion and archaic ritual which is prevalent in the portrayal of police at this time directly relates to the image of police created by the Royal Commission into the Police of 1962, a public facade still upheld in some circles ten years later, but under strong attack. The policing of sexual offences also became a much more widely-discussed issue in the period following 1968 and again provided dramatists with material for a very direct presentation of the police, not as upholders of an older, more stable morality, but as hypocritical voyeurs - something which lent itself to a great deal of visual business, which was almost dictated to the black

humourist by the world outside of the theatre. Another aspect of this second "phase" of police public relations in our era was the issue of civil rights, a virtual media circus which was particularly "hot" on the call for an independent complaints authority, police brutality, stop and search laws, warrants and their misuse and occasional absence from police arrest procedure, "verballing", informers, and illegal detention. These subjects were of such concern to the playwrights of the time that even Tom Stoppard, not at this stage of his career generally regarded as an "issue" playwright, used them as a subject for satire. The form most utilised is, once again, farce, and there is a consensus of concentration upon the stage business of intrusion and physical violence, as well as a paradoxical relationship of word and act. Perhaps the most familiar of all satiric techniques in this area was the deliberate conjuring up of a Dixon of Dock Green figure, only to bathetically explode the myth by showing the behaviour of such stereotypes to be well below acceptable ethical standards. After his appointment in April 1972, Sir Robert Mark, the new commissioner, who had been given the job as a direct response to the corruption scandals of the previous five years, promoted the idea of the "new force", of the honest, liberal-minded and intelligent uniformed officer who, it was hoped would lead the police from the quandary into which they had placed themselves. In subsequent years, Howard Brenton would lead the assault upon this new image, which, not surprisingly, had left him unconvinced. The chapter will close with a close critical analysis of Loot, with particular reference to Orton's concentration on the Challenor affair as a direct source for his satirical attack upon the police, and the way in which Orton's

techniques of satire through a form of farce constantly pushes the audience away from the traditional dream-like never-never land of that genre toward the scandalous and corrupt political world of the sixties.

Ineffective or genuinely dangerous doctoring seems to be a primary target for satirists of our period as a whole. A general disquiet about doctoring since the early sixties led to accusations of neglect or incompetence amongst doctors on a level which could endanger a patient's health. Publicity about serious errors in diagnosis and treatment of patients reached such a high level that by 1967 the government was under sufficient pressure to be forced to bring about the appointment of a Health Service Commissioner, with powers commensurate to that of an ombudsman, in order to investigate cases of professional misconduct.¹ There were also revisions of the General Medical Council's powers of disciplinary action against doctors guilty of "serious misconduct in a professional respect in 1969"², and in 1973 police powers with reference to cases "involving violence, dishonesty, indecency, drink or drugs, because they may reflect on a [doctor's] suitability to continue in his profession"³ also underwent extension. Still the trend of press criticism continued, and in 1973 Sir Keith Joseph, Secretary of State for Social Services commissioned a major inquiry.⁴ The degree of publicity which the medical profession had attracted created a serious unease in relations between doctors and the media.⁵ In one study of 1972, it was pointed out that:

Doctors are often resentful about what they may regard as unwarranted intrusion by the media into matters which they consider to be of purely professional concern, such as medical ethics, the methods of clinical investigation, or the problems of doctors who have become unfit to practice owing to mental or physical illness.⁶

The quite apt reply from the media is exemplified by Sir William Haley, editor of The Times, who wrote that:

The representations, the advice, the special pleadings, the appeals to responsibility are all designed to stimulate a self censorship which is far more pernicious than open regulation would be, because its nature is to be hidden, imprecise and incapable of exact recognition.⁷

Certainly an obsession with secrecy amongst doctors, and professional loyalty which extends to the concealment of the misconduct or incompetency of one doctor by another had been a problem in our period, as the Merrison Report had admitted.⁸

The portrayal of doctors as inept, as dangerously inefficient in the diagnosis and treatment of patients is something which seems ubiquitous to the comedy of the period 1964-1974. There are serious misdiagnoses, such as that by a doctor who pronounces an unconscious patient dead in Lay-By (1971) (pp.54-57)⁹, or by the appropriately named Dr. Bravo, a highly theatrical, overblown fraud of a court physician in Barnes' The Bewitched (1974), (pp.205-206). His treatments are spoken of as being more harmful than the ailments they are intended to cure, and he is characterised by the remark "He [a former patient] said: "You doctors oft gi'wrong

diagnoses. My mother was treated f'tertian fever and she died o'quatern ague". "Ne'er fear", I replied, "When I treat a patient f'tertian fever, he dies o'tertian fever." And he did" (p.239). Bravo is also the object of such quips: "DR. BRAVO: But medicine'a science o' probability and uncertainty/RAFAEL: Certainly the way you practise it" (p.275). In Loot (1965)¹⁰ the doctor who signs Mrs. MacLeavy's death warrant "in a fuzz of scientific disbelief" (p.251) misrepresents her cause of death, hence covering for Nurse Fay, who is guilty of nursing which seems to bring about the death of her patients with truly alarming frequency. "You've practised your own form of genocide for over a decade", comments Truscott, "and called it nursing" (p.254). Livings' The Little Mrs. Foster Show (1968)¹¹ has as its central, and probably along with the last, most memorable scene a piece of high black farce, in which the doctor, who is an habitual drunk, carries out the unnecessary amputation of Hook's leg, amidst a great deal of conventional, but extremely funny slapstick involving stethoscopes, wheeled stretchers, thermometers and the inevitable doctors' hypodermic syringe (pp.58-71).¹² Hook resists the amputation desperately (I'm not having it off. It's the only one I've got with the toes that way round" - p.67), but eventually the doctor, resisting the attempts of Orara and Helen to restrain him, inadvertently severs an artery in Hook's leg, necessitating an amputation. This represents a heavy contrast to an earlier scene, where Mrs. Foster saves Hook's injured leg despite a complete lack of medical knowledge (pp.18-23). The final image of the amputation scene, that of the doctor staggering drunkenly off, his hands, which are covered in blood, "clutching the gin bottle and glass" may seem a little overpowering, but in its context it is a cogent

image, and one which might well be representative of the black humourist's attitude to the medical profession at this time. Certainly, it is repeated in Tom Gallacher's Revival (1972)¹³, with the exit of the incompetent, drunken Dr. Anstrud, although on this occasion we are spared the blood (p.21). Black comedies often showed patients to be in greater dread of treatment than of illness at this time. The prospect of his treatment at an NHS hospital brings the injured scrubber, normally a hated outcast, genuine sympathy from his "victims" in Nichols' The Freeway (1974), p.51,¹⁴ whilst Fanny displays a similar dread, not of illness but treatment at hospital - a fear which is later shown to be justified - in Leo Lehman's End of Story (1969) (p.32).¹⁵ Perhaps the final word in this matter could be given to Simon Gray's Mr. Godboy in Dutch Uncle (1969)¹⁶, who says of sex offenders: "I hope the authorities realise hanging's too good for them, what they need is medical treatment from specialists" (p.61).

In 1967, a young and newly elected David Steel forced through his Abortion Act, which allowed easier legal abortions on demand. Roy Jenkins described how the Bill's introduction brought about a vote which cut sharply across party lines¹⁷, but the occurrence of over 100,000 illegal abortions per year by 1966¹⁸ made abortion both a natural and humanitarian cause. Nevertheless, the collapse of confidence in public attitudes to doctors is not unconnected to this social change. The abortion law reform, which was of course bound to be the subject of criticism from the right, was also attacked by the left. Two months after the act became law, New Society published an "expose"¹⁹, featuring the experience of a 32 year-old married woman who, for sound medical reasons related to the birth of her

previous child, sought to procure an abortion through the NHS and found that not only were women in her position "treated like cattle, or good time girls who had slipped up"²⁰, but after trying three different hospitals, she was unable to find a doctor who was willing to carry out the operation. When she threatened to go to a "back street abortionist" the doctor she was consulting commented "that's your problem".²¹ The woman was eventually forced to go to a Harley Street specialist, who charged an exorbitant fee in carrying out the operation. The article went on to reflect the attitude of the press of centre/left liberal leanings in describing the medical profession as "entrenched behind a stone wall of cautious conservatism", but in defence of the profession it must be said that many doctors were not opposed to abortion on moral grounds, but rather were still afraid of prosecution, the nature of the abortion act being a little ambiguous on their legal rights. Before the bill was passed, the police went to great lengths in gathering evidence and preparing cases in the prosecution of doctors, as for example, in the case of the doctor who had performed an abortion in 1964 for a single girl who had been abandoned by her boyfriend and had no means of supporting a child.²² This case was not at all uncommon, especially in the reporting of such periodicals as New Society and New Statesman and even newspapers like The Guardian. Doctors who carried out abortions, other than respected specialists, were liable to incur, at the very least, the disrespect of their colleagues, since there seems to have been a particular suspicion, amounting almost to paranoia, within the BMA and GMC about doctors who may be seen to be procuring abortions.²³

A suspicion of the inability of patients to attain the

services of anything but "quacks" in procuring abortions is very much the subject of C.P. Taylor's one experiment with a kind of existentialist/political black comedy, Happy Days Are Here Again (1967).²⁴ The character, Postman, is concerned about the possibility of the whore Ruth, who all the men in the play have shared, being the victim of poor doctoring. Like many of the women of her time, Ruth has been forced to resort to Harley Street, to "a good man in London for that little job" (p.155) in procuring an abortion. The fears of the main characters for Ruth's safety are not really allayed by the assurances of Monty and Waxman. Donovan puts the issue to Monty in very contemporary terms: "If he's as good as you make out, what the hell is he doing, carrying out abortions?" (p.171), and to this question, in its historical context, there could only be an uncertain answer. Finally when a detective arrives, there is the inevitable scene of farcical concealment, mainly verbal in this case, as this is a radio play, of the truth about the abortion:

DETECTIVE: That was the girl?

LIPHITZ: Ruth, my niece.

DETECTIVE: Speaking from where?

LIPHITZ: London. Listen we're all friends here...
she'd gone to procure an abortion.

ANGEL (quickly): Owing to a heart condition.

DONOVAN: She had a doctor's certificate. (p.189)

The schoolboyish "caught red-handedness" of the scene serves to point up the absurdity of their need to conceal the abortion from the authorities at all. The play seems to set up a broadly pro-abortion position in contrasting the hanging of Waxman, who is probably falaciously imputed to have fathered the child, for

doing so (p.181), with the decision of Ruth to have the child in any case (p.189), but leaves the audience with another option in the dismissal of Liphitz's climactic speech asking "what is alive" as "shitty philosophy" (p.190). Eveling's "darkly humorous play" Come and Be Killed (1967) is another comedy of the year of the Abortion Act, and one which takes up the issue with an attack on doctors, through Jerry, who is advising Jim on how to go about procuring his girlfriend's abortion. Jerry speaks with regret of his wife's abortion, describing the operation in lurid detail, conjuring up Macbeth (p.50), and expressing a repressed desire to have "protected it, from all and sundry, from the bloody medical profession, the doctors...the knife...and harm...the one person who should have been between it and floating in that bucket...instead of which..." (p.51). The cost of the operation is £100, too much for Jim to pay, yet cheaper than the "going rate" with specialists at the time.²⁵ The play seems to be committed neither to an "anti" or "pro" position, but its imagery is extremely powerful. The stage business with which the discussion of abortion takes place is fraught with images of living and dead matter. Finally, after Jerry has left Jim with the crucial address (p.67), an act suggestive of a back street abortionist, Bettina returns from the operation and presents Jim with a dead rabbit, the blood of which stains her dress, that had been intended for their "celebration" dinner. She then leaves him. As with Happy Days Are Here Again, the images of absurd death, and inappropriate life, which are exemplified by the title of Eveling's play, are most likely to stay with the observer beyond anything else in the play. The comments about the family doctor in Orton's The Good and Faithful Servant

(1967)²⁶ are revealing, not only in the sense of being an ironic commentary on the often noted distance of the medical profession from its clientele at this time, but also on the complications involved in family doctors and the need for young girls to procure abortions. Orton was firmly pro-abortion, and two days after his first (private) showing of The Good and Faithful Servant, he commented in his diary:

Watched a programme called "Three After Six" on television. It's just three middle-class people discussing problems posed in the newspapers. Words like "psychological aspects" and "social workers" and "the social and legal aspect of the case" and "this poses great problems for the psychologist" abound in the programme. They discussed the proposed amendments to the abortion laws. Kept saying what is best for the "mother" and, of course, the "unborn child". As though anyone in their right minds would consider the unborn child. Any more than one would consider the feeling of a cancer or a tumour. How I hate liberal-minded, smooth, middle-class, "broad-minded", "with it" women.²⁷

(15th February, 1967)

The element of scandal which associated itself with doctors in connection with this overwhelming moral question began to extend, by the latter part of the nineteen sixties, to the private practices of doctors, which were frequently openly

derided in the press. In one case, for example, in 1969, a mercifully unnamed GP became the centre of unfortunate publicity when he was deregistered for a prosecution of indecency.²⁸ Little could be done by the profession to prevent the adverse publicity attending such cases or that of the alcoholic doctor who had been deregistered for committing a homosexual assault on a young boy but had been restored to the register after producing proof that he was cured of his alcoholism, only to relapse into alcoholism and commit yet more sexual assaults.²⁹ One doctor commented:

To subject a man to a week of headlines like "Sex on The Surgery Couch" is to punish him. The fact that he may be found not guilty at the week's end does not erase the headline from people's memories.³⁰

The crisis for the medical profession was made all the more serious by the fact that doctors had previously been held in such high esteem by the community.

The tone of aggression towards the private lives of medics was taken up a step by Orton. In Loot, Dennis remarks of Nurse Fay's sex drive: "She does it at any old time. Typical member of the medical profession she is" (p.210), whilst in What The Butler Saw (1969)³¹, Dr. Prentice thinks nothing of forcing his secretary to undress for less than ethical reasons (pp.366-68). This fine, respected psychiatrist, who has a suggestion of Stephen Ward about him (he fears scandal, for "the doors of London society would be slammed in my face" - p.374), is assessed by Dr. Rance as "a transvestite, fetishist, bi-sexual murderer [who] displays considerable deviation overlap. We may get necrophilia, too. As a sort of bonus" (p.428). Rance believes the tales of homosexual fetishism which Nick spins of

Dr. Prentice (pp.410 and 433), but is in no position to be self-righteous, as he himself regards as "normal" the making of sexual advances to secretaries (p.381). In Lay-By, the apparent corpse of Lesley becomes the object of sexual gameplaying for Dick and Doug, the medical orderlies (pp.58-59). In Howard Barker's Claw (1975)³² the asylum orderly, Lily, seems to be obsessed with sex, and after describing his lust for two girls in a cafe at which he committed a terrorist bombing (p.211), he begins to speak of a series of celebrities as being prostitutes and homosexuals (pp.220-24, p.227). Lily is a "healer" who seems to associate violence with the sexual act.

Indeed, the two corrupt asylum keepers in this play are probably intended to allude to the great deal of publicity in our period about the conditons under which the mentally ill were kept. There were major inquiries into scandals involving psychiatric hospitals in 1969, 1971 and 1972³³, and as early as 1964³⁴ there was concern about the capacity of hospitals to properly house and treat the mentally ill. Certainly, in plays like What The Butler Saw and Claw, the inmates, who are in each case unjustly committed, seem saner than their keepers. The mad psychiatrist seems to be a common figure in the comedy of this time. Aside from Prentice and Rance, there is also Dr. Herder in Barnes' The Ruling Class (1969), who is clearly as mad as a snake by the end of the play, and Dr. Clear in Gallacher's Revival, who is anything but after his encounter with Bernard. The doctor in The Little Mrs. Foster Show is also an unbalanced man, more due to his guilt than his alcoholism. Tales of doctors suffering from mental illness were widespread at the time, and it is perhaps fortunate that although many such cases were reported in the press at the time, the GMC went to great lengths

to have names withheld.³⁵ This however, substantially contributed to the belief that the medical profession was deliberately shrouding its shortcomings in secrecy.

The incidence of fraud and corruption in the medical profession had risen to a very high level in our period, something which was evident to the press, but ignored or glossed over by the profession. Even the usually reliable Merrison, whilst acknowledging the extent of the problem, is a little evasive in tone: "In the nature of the problem there are no reliable statistics which enable us to make, with any confidence, an estimate of the size of the problem. But it is clear from the evidence we received it was not small".³⁶ Just how not small it was, was evinced by the abundance of articles appearing in the popular press involving a doctor's greed outweighing his medical judgement. The spectacular corruptions of Doctor Williams and Doctor Ward³⁷ in the period were underpinned by a groundswell of minor corruptions and defraudings on the part of doctors, nurses and specialists. Self interest and an obsession with acquisition characterise all the doctors who are not quacks, and some that are in the drama of the kind we are considering. The doctor of The Little Mrs. Foster Show is, of course, being employed by Orara to cover up that officer's concentration camp brutalities; and Orara is not slow to point out that he is "paid a lot of money" to do so. The doctor who is to examine the body of Kemp, the murder victim of Entertaining Mr. Sloane³⁸ (1964) is also to be "manage[d]" by Ed (p.148), and so too the "drunk" of a family doctor in Wilson's The Pleasure Principle, for "trumping up committal orders" against Robert (p.46). Money seems to be the primary motivational force in the life of the doctor of Bond's Early

Morning, who, when he hears the sound of violent street disorders, runs off with the comment "If they're lynching they'll need death certificates. Is there a back way out?" (p.165). In Lehman's End of Story, Keith's father is tortured by a nurse in his hospital. She puts his bell and water pitcher out of reach, leaves open his curtains and his window at night, and isolates him from other patients, refusing to improve his conditions, until Keith pays her the bribe for which she asks (pp.51-52,55-57). In Nichols' The Freeway, Nancy also bribes the nurse carrying the scrubber to an NHS hospital, pleading, as she passes the nurse a note that he be "given the least harmful treatment" (p.52). In Brenton's Fruit (1970), the doctor-protagonist, significantly an osteopath,³⁹ visits a form of revenge upon the world for his being born a thalidomide child by his torturous medical practices, and corrupt behaviour.⁴⁰ In The Trial of Doctor Fancy (1966)⁴¹, Clive Exton presents the outrageous scenario of the doctor of the title, in association with a psychologist and the manager of a clothes shop specialising in producing trousers for people with stumps for legs, convincing people he has had forcibly removed from the shop to his clinic that they must have their legs amputated or suffer the terrible trauma of the "cyclops complex", a condition involving excessive tallness invented by the psychologist, who like Fancy and the manager of the shop, owns a third of the legless trousers business. Fancy is only discovered by the death of an amputee being revealed by a colleague, who is quickly discredited by an outrageously unlikely sex scandal cooked up between the flash, Harley Street man and his matron, so that after the defence and prosecution sum up in the trial, the judge reveals himself to be "in on it", giving a very slanted

summary to the jury, who duly find Fancy and his associates not guilty, and shuffle off, the (television) audience discovering as the final black punch-line of the play, that they (the jury), too, are the "beneficiaries" of Fancy's Old Testament style cure for the "cyclops complex". It is this kind of humour, in its particular historical context, which turn Dr. Clear's assertion that he is an "auditor" into a fine irony in Gallacher's Revival (p.28), and brings a convoluted plausibility to the character of the doctor in Early Morning, who is prepared to take the lives of his patients in order to reap the rewards of being on the winning team (p.164). This doctor is clearly interested only in himself, as is apparent in the scene where he "treats" Arthur's injuries (pp.185-87). In this case, as in Loot, The Trial of Doctor Fancy and a number of other plays of the latter sixties, the death of a patient is merely the means to a financial end.

Peter Nichols' The National Health or Nurse Norton's Affair⁴² (1970) is perhaps the most complete attack on the medical profession of the era, and along with The Freeway and Poppy, one of Nichols' most socially-conscious plays. The play was inspired by Nichols' own experience in a National Health Service hospital with a collapsed lung.⁴³ Nichols had much for which to resent doctors, since this condition had been twice misdiagnosed by an Earls Court doctor before his admittance to hospital⁴⁴, whilst the birth of his own severely retarded child had been bungled by the attending doctor, putting his wife in physical and emotional agony.⁴⁵ In putting his experience into the theatre, Nichols knew that his opinions would find sympathy from an outside world not unfamiliar with such tales.⁴⁶

In The National Health, Nichols gives some considerable credence to the accusations of inefficiency in doctors, but is

humane enough to Dr. Bird to portray her as being so tired (because of the long hours worked by National Health doctors) that her negligence is understandable - after one bout of semi-comatose examining she admits to having been awake for 29 hours (p.46), whilst on another occasion she causes Mackie considerable discomfort by falling asleep on his chest in the middle of an examination (pp.77-78). The patients at this NHS hospital are made to conceal their ailments, rather than reveal them - "Try not to make a fuss while matron's here", says Nurse Sweet (p.75), extending the business of concealment, which I will deal with more extensively later, still further.

Nichols also examines the extremely contentious (at this time) issue of the efficiency of imported doctors, in the character of the Indian student, who rarely seems to guess right at Doctor Boyd's questions (pp.43-47), probably a reflection of the almost proverbial distrust of foreign doctors on the NHS.⁴⁷ By 1971, one in five doctors were born outside of Britain, and since 1967 the number of doctors arriving from abroad equalled that which was produced by medical schools,⁴⁸ but a number of examining bodies within the medical profession found that their standards were considerably lower, despite their being allowed to continue as principles in NHS hospitals.⁴⁹ This situation had to be allowed to continue, simply because the NHS would not otherwise be able to find the staff to fill its hospitals, as local authorities were not slow to point out.⁵⁰ Similarly, the proficiency of some foreign doctors in English would cause concern amongst governing authorities, and alarm among patients, something which the lower end of the newspaper market, in particular, would exploit, with the unwitting assistance of such personages as the president of the BMA, who in 1969,

complained that the Department of Employment and Productivity were "handing out work certificates too freely to foreign doctors".⁵¹

Nichols, despite his less than flattering portrayal of the Indian student, is broadly anti-racist in his views on coloured hospital staff. Of the patients, Loach is the most vociferously racist. He is immediately belligerent towards the West Indian, Nurse Lake ("No blackie pushes me around" - p.18) and his attitude does not improve, much of the comedy of verbal misunderstanding deriving from his prejudices:

ASH: We're all brothers beneath the skin friend.

LOACH: That's what I said. I said, we're all British and the British ought to stand together against the wogs. (p.67)

Mackie adds his own quasi-fascist brand of humour to Loach's opposing mixed marriages as "sullyng good, sound stock with alien race" (p.62), while Nurse Lake injects him with a painkiller. It does not seem to have been noticed by critics that the Loach/Mackie relationship with Lake in the main plot is made to parallel the subplot - the glamourised TV soap opera parody of Nurse Norton's Affair with Young Doctor Boyd, which Boyd Senior opposes as a mixed marriage (p.29 and p.34). But both Lake and Norton are ultimately given a sympathetic hearing. The scene between Lake and Sweet, where the latter wonders at the former's tolerance of racist patients, sees Sweet point out that "The National Health Service would pack up tomorrow if you all went back where you came from" (pp.27-28), a very valid argument in the year in which Enoch Powell was possibly at the highest point of his national popularity. Nurse Lake is, for all her patients' bickering and her impersonal manner toward

them (she cannot even remember their names) acknowledged as the best nurse on the ward. Nurse Norton also proves her worth in the subplot, by donating her kidney for an essential operation upon her one and only true love, an ineffably funny scene in which Dr. Boyd the elder laments "I thought the odour of sanctity was in my nostrils, when all the time it was the stench of racial prejudice" (p.82), and is comforted by Sister, with "Staff Nurse Norton could give Neil her heart well enough, but without your help she couldna give him her kidney" (p.83). The portrayal of black nurses as sympathetic figures also occurs in The Little Mrs. Foster Show, in which only Nurse Helen has the presence of mind to save Hook's life, and End of Story, where Keith's father remarks that the black nurse does not share in the corruption of the one who tortures him (p.52). It is a mark of the utter turpitude of Barnet at the end of The National Health that he enters "blacked up" to lead the final display of dancing at the grotesque curtain (p.109).

Sexual malpractices are also misnomers not unknown to the glum tatty world of The National Health. When in the Dr. Kildare/Dr. Finlay's Casebook world of Nurse Norton's Affair, Norton refuses sex before marriage (p.52), there is an intentional contrast with the following scene, where Barnet tells the story of a colleague who develops a fetish for the shaving of patients genitals, and who is finally sacked for shaving a man who is being prepared for a tonsilectomy, a tale which is appended by the story of a specialist who is sexually excited by the sound of young boys with coughs (pp.53-54). Barnet comments, "most of the healing arts are bent if you want my frank opinion", adding "I don't know what your [Ash's] opinions are about this highly controversial issue. You were a

teacher, that's the same country. A socially acceptable sublimation" (p.54.).⁵² The scene works on the simple level of an "ideal and reality" contrast of two scenes, both highly stylised, and both dealing with the same issue, that of sex and the medical profession, but in an entirely different manner, constituting a radical manipulation of audience response to the first scene by the second. The stage business of the first scene with its eye for clichéd romantic gesture of embrace and anger (*" She turns her back and stands, legs apart, bosom heaving, hands on hips"* - p.51 - all this in the inevitably "leggy" outfit - pp.50-51), ending in Neil's "spectacular paroxysm", foreshadowing his equally spectacular illness, is deliberately contrasted with the sight of Barnet preparing Ash, by shaving his genitals, for a mundane operation for his mundane illness. As Barnet delivers his equally theatrical monologue, we are faced with his goosing of a nurse with the brush, and his tales of perverted medics interspersed with exchanges with the audience. In case a 1969 audience could not grasp the immediacy of the issue, he even refers to his source of the purveyor of "medical journals" in Soho. Another example of this ongoing dialectic between soap opera morality and theatrically heightened reality, which so pervades the play, occurs where Mackie is wheeled off to the terminal ward at the end of act two, scene two (pp.77-80), and there follows a scene in which Boyd Senior prepares the complex operation in which his son's life will be saved (pp.80-84). In the next scene Mackie's death is announced (pp.86-87), and this, in turn, is followed by Boyd Senior's completion of a successful lifesaving operation on Neil, which is intercut by Foster's death (pp.90-95).

The element of spiritual corruption which is so

pronounced in the play is manifested primarily by the character of Barnet. He is a mephistophel corrupt in ward, deed and act. Taylor, amongst other critics, sees him as a sympathetic character early in the play, who turns into a particularly nasty piece of work by the end⁵³, which is described by Cushman as "among[st] the ugliest stretches of writing I remember."⁵⁴ But Barnet's character rarely calls upon our sympathy. He certainly commands the good will of his charges by his music hall banter, and his seemingly more personal knowledge of each patient's condition, but during his soliloquies after the deaths of Rees (pp.40-42) and Mackie (p.80), he displays a genuine dislike of the characters concerned, rather than the indifference of characters like Lake or Doctor Boyd senior. His jocularly amongst the patients often gives rise to a trickster's malice, as when he seems to cause Rees to urinate in his pyjamas by making him laugh (despite a warning not to do so) and then bullies the old man for not asking for a bottle (pp.24-25). Finally, his belief that "the healing arts are bent" is expressed in his attack upon Loach and Ash at the end of the play. These two are engaged in a game of monopoly which rebounds with heavy irony upon them with every move - Loach, the ex-convict without family, home or possessions, is asked to pay school fees, whilst the dying Ash's annuity matures. When Loach receives a "get out of jail free", Barnet comments "you could have done with that before", and proceeds to reveal Loach's criminal past, which Loach had told him of in confidence, to the other patients (p.99). He then uncovers the latent homosexuality of Ash, ostensibly to drive a wedge between the two friends (pp.99-100). Barnet tempts Loach, an alcoholic struggling to take the cure, with a bottle of gin, and is

initially rebuffed (p.100), but Loach's will breaks at Barnet's second attempt, and he is persuaded to take a bottle from Barnet, who has also placed bets for him. Barnet demands two pounds, an extortionate amount to Loach, explaining "I've got my overheads to cover" (p.105). His final appearance in minstrel gear "as the master of ceremonies in a dance of death"⁵⁵ is indicative of his moral status in the play. As the character who most frequently provides commentary on contemporary issues Barnet encapsulates the social commentary implicit to the play, which seemed to a reviewer of the first performance, B.A. Young, to be "a slice of Emergency Ward 10; but whereas Emergency Ward 10 was designed to present hospital life as reassuringly as possible to a timorous public, The National Health seeks to draw attention to its shortcomings."⁵⁶

The strong farcical undertone of The National Health is a major contributant to the final effect of Nichols' satire on the Health Service. The scene in which Dr. Boyd is about to carry out the operation on his son, and is propelled up from a trap like "a prima donna taking the centre of the stage for a big aria", is described by Worth as "painful farce" with a "disturbingly absurd effect".⁵⁷ Constantly, the potentialities of farce presented by such things as screens for the concealment of various acts and the business involving the functions of the body are used to bring home the satire with particular force. The death of Mackie beautifully captures the painful laughter of the play. As Bond calls for screens to cover the dying Mackie, Flagg's screens are unexpectedly removed to reveal him "caught in the act, unnaturally high on his bedpan" (p.77). The absurd exigency of Foster's death is also built up to farcical proportions, as the staff run about with screens in a vain

attempt to conceal Foster's demise, and search desperately for the key to the resuscitation unit, which has gone missing (p.92).

The act of defecation is particularly stressed as an image of corruption in The National Health. There are Mackie's and Flagg's incidences of "violent farting" (pp.35,37,79) which are often used to gain comic effect, the continual stage business involving bedpans and urination (pp.16,24,39,41,76-77) and the almost obsessive questioning by the nurses about the patients bowel movements. All contribute to the general impression of ill-health, and seem to parallel the physical decline of the patients since all of the patients who die are involved in scatological stage business. This kind of "buffo" contains a darker side in the constant imagery of illness. The amputated legs of Mr. Tyler (p.10) are an image which also conjures up the stage business of amputation (very often, although not in the case of The National Health) where the dead limbs and flesh are even shown on stage and become images of physical corruption to parallel the spiritual corruption of their owners and handlers, often through outrageous comic business - similar use is made of entire corpses in some plays. The Trial of Dr. Fancy, Early Morning, The Little Mrs. Foster Show and Come and Be Killed all take up the "dead flesh" image, whilst corpses are toyed with in Loot, Lay-By, The Bewitched and Happy Days Are Here Again, to name but a few examples that spring first to mind.

Barnet is also the central figure in the play's technique of self-conscious theatricality. He is a music-hall comic figure who is also made to appear at one point as a magician, referring to people in the medical profession as "my colleagues in the business" (p.41), and who constantly engages in repartee

with the audience. It is perhaps indicative of his power over his patients that they are only dimly aware of their "theatrical" status. In the farcical scene in which the senile and deluded Rees urinates on the floor, Mackie wonders for how long "you [will] keep the farce going" (p.25). Similarly, the overpowering fear of the patients, especially Loach, is the surgery, referred to by them as "the theatre" (for example, p.56). In the drama of our decade generally, the most intense moments of social satire seem to coincide with moments when the "spell" of the theatre is most explicitly pointed out, and hence debased. So, when in Habeas Corpus (1973)⁵⁸, Alan Bennett's Dr. Wicksteed confesses his incompetence, and helplessness in the face of illness, it is in the form of an aside (p.196), and so, too when Mrs. Swabb, the self-appointed "chorus" (p.194), addresses the audience, we are taken from the internal structure of the plot to hear commentaries on the doctors immorality or greed in a very direct form. The play from which Habeas Corpus seems to derive heavily, What The Butler Saw, also contains a theatrical self-consciousness which becomes more marked as the play's social criticism gathers momentum towards the end of act two. Thus Rance comments that "lunatics are melodramatic. The subtleties of drama are wasted on them" (p.427) in seeking the lunatic Prentice, and acknowledges the play's "climax" towards the curtain (p.447). A similar pattern is evident in The Little Mrs. Foster Show, which is throughout, a "show" within a play, and in The Trail of Dr. Fancy, where Fancy has commented "That's showbusiness" when one patient who has had his legs amputated is announced to have died. The intention of these, and other such theatrical references in plays about medical malpractices, that of suddenly touching an audience

with an immediate social reality through the rarified world of farce, becomes clearer when we examine its employment in relation to comedies about the police.

From mid summer, 1964 onwards, it became common to read articles of praise for the police⁵⁹, or which alluded to the difficulty of a policeman's job⁶⁰ in the liberal press. Even such "left wing" weeklies as New Statesman were busy providing evidence of the relative integrity of the police.⁶¹ Aside from a brief period in which police public relations were adversely affected by a series of scandals in late 1963 and 1964, the police in the first four years of our period shone in the afterglow of The Royal Commission Into The Police, 1962, which had been called after a series of corruption scandals in the latter 1950s, and which would be made to look small beer indeed by comparison to the events of 1968-1972. The Royal Commission gave the police a "clean bill of health", aside from a certain unease about such things as brutality and internal investigation, although even these were regarded as problems which were limited to very few officers and forces. It basically reinforced the stereotype of the reliable, hard working, citizen officer. Hart's complaint that "The old familiar catchwords were trotted out without any attempt to analyse them"⁶² seems to be typical of the attitude of subsequent political commentators. Whatever the analytic merits of the report, it does seem to have created, or rather continued, a period of relative harmony between the British police and the public. It is a pretty well-established maxim

amongst drama critics of the eighties that that sentiment of the new "generation" of playwrights of the fifties and sixties did not run particularly in favour of the Police Force. Perhaps this is so, but there is no notable anti-police feeling (with one exception) amongst the "black comedies" of the period 1964 to 1967.

In Peter Terson's Zigger Zagger⁶³ (1967) stories about police brutality seem to be believed by Harry, yet they prove to be apocryphal when he encounters the policeman at the football match (pp.48-51). Here Harry speaks of the appalling tortures he is liable to endure in the custody of the police (he has been arrested for throwing a bottle at a policeman) whilst the policeman guarding him is clearly more interested in the football. The police break up violence at the football, intercede on behalf of victims of racial abuse (pp.93-96) and are meant to be there to help in the view of Harry's elders (p.58), but Harry chooses to believe the "myths" of police brutality and misconduct. The attitude of the author to the police seems to be roundly supportive of the policeman's complaint about soccer hooligans:

You can imagine how our blokes feel about it.
They're expected to risk getting their heads
split open in a wild punch-up only to see the
blokes they nicked fined a few bob. We might as
well save ourselves the trouble of ^{even} attending
court. (p.81)

The furthest Terson goes in attacking the police is to poke rather harmless incidental fun at them, as when the club chairman says of the police "They're only human, aren't you constable", and the officer leaves us in doubt with the

rejoinder "Thank you, Sir" (p.51). The police are honest dolts in Zigger Zagger, as is the policeman in the "she's dead" (1965) playlet of Paul Ableman's Tests⁶⁴, although the system which he serves, especially with regard to capital punishment, is seen to be a brutal one (pp.23-28). It is significant that in this set of playlets, which are frequently both topical and satirical (concentrating especially upon capital punishment and war, implicitly the Vietnam War), Ableman can find nothing particularly denegrating to say of the police.

Joe Orton was not entirely as anti-police as Loot would indicate. In fact he regarded them broadly as "a necessary evil"⁶⁵, and in all his plays other than Loot, they are portrayed as honest. The second most important policeman in the Orton oeuvre is Sergeant Match, who is the "concealed from" of the second half of What The Butler Saw (1969).⁶⁶ The reason why Match is able to assume the structural status of the character representing the moral "status quo" from which corruption must be concealed in farce, is that he is incorruptible, and is stated to be so (p.419), so it is unsurprising that at the end of the play, Match, who has been wounded, drugged and dressed up in a leopard skin dress during the course of the play⁶⁷, is able to descend from above in a "haze of glory" (p.446) to pronounce a farcical restoration of order with a wave of the magic phallus of Sir Winston Churchill (pp.446-448). The literal deus ex machina position of Match is indicative of the moral status of policemen in the world of the play, and seems to be reflective of the society outside the theatre, although he is obliged to participate in a cover-up of the activities of the play (p.448)). So too, in Funeral Games (1968)⁶⁸, the restoration of order is a restoration of law and order, with two policemen

arriving to arrest the participants in the appalling goings-on of the play (p.360), and producing a warrant (unlike Truscott and later black comedy detectives) to search McCorquodale's house, and unearth the body buried, this time, in the cellar. In other Orton plays the police are seen as part of a broader societal violence - they may side with the bourgeoisie, but only as the "citizen" officers of the Royal Commission, and as such, they are not singled out for criticism. In fact, they generally need to be deceived into an "understanding" position, as at the similar conclusions of The Ruffian On The Stair⁶⁹ (1964) ("I'll fetch the police. This has been a crime of passion. They'll understand. They have wives and goldfish of their own" - p.61) and The Erpingham Camp⁷⁰ (1966) ("You'll find the police sympathetic. They know how it feels. Most of them have had their own wives insulted at some time or another" - p.318). In the first case, a tale is fabricated to conceal murder from the police, implying the honesty of the force, and in the second the self-deception of the campers seems about to lead them into duplicity. The police are also seen as restorers of order at the farcical ending of Taylor's Happy Days Are Here Again (1967). The scene in which the body of Waxman is concealed from the detective in a cupboard (a situation which is extremely familiar in drama of this kind in our period - Loot and Jumpers come readily to mind), is given much greater force by the moral status of the detective as one from whom illegality must be concealed. When the body falls from the cupboard, the response of the murderers is hilarious:

Donovan; Liphitz, who's that?

MONTY: Did you know about that, Liphitz?

ANGEL: It seems to be a dead man, Liphitz.

In your cupboard.

POSTMAN: How did he get there, Liphitz?

LIPHITZ:[to DETECTIVE] This is Waxman [...]

DONOVAN: What you on about, Liphitz?

ANGEL: What are you trying to say, Liphitz. The poor man's mind is wandering.

POSTMAN: Take a grip of yourself, Liphitz. Try to be coherent.

MONTY:[to DETECTIVE] He's obviously hysterical, Inspector. (p.190)

The dialogue continues in this manner for some time, before the detective carries out his duty, and sends off his prisoners to be hung - a social evil, Taylor seems to say, but again, as in Tests, not one which soils the policeman.

Whilst the period 1964-1967 was one of relative calm in the relationship of the police and the public, there comes in the period 1968 to 1974 a profound change in both public perception of the police, and contemporary dramatists portrayal of them. It would be a simple enough matter to explain the new, more cynical attitude of writers to the police (who suddenly become violent, corrupt, criminals in uniform, with little respect for privacy or civil liberties) as a "post 1968" phenomenon, that is, a facet of the alternative politics and drama created by the crisis of 1968, but this is something of an oversimplification. After all, dramatists of pre-1968, who are not regarded as being of the Brenton generation and ideology, such as Stoppard, Gray and Nichols, are amongst those who attack the police in this era. This broad front of hostility occurred mainly, I think, because of a collapse in confidence in the police force, which was induced by the crisis in the reportage

of police corruption which occurred in this period. For forces all around Britain, there occurred a peak in the number of disciplinary offences in the period 1968 to 1972⁷¹, a statistic which was strengthened by the increase in the number of unfavourable headlines about the police in both the popular and left-wing press. In New Society, for example, there are roughly three to four times the number of articles on the police for the period 1968-72, as the period 1963-67. Further, a much greater proportion of these articles displayed enmity to the police force. Statistics gathered from 1965 to 1968 revealed a significant jump in the number of actual and substantiated complaints against the police in 1968.⁷² This was despite persistent complaints about the rectitude of internal investigations of police officers by police officers; which led, in the summer of 1969, to an all-party House of Commons motion acknowledging an awareness of "concern which has been expressed by members of both the police and the public over the present method of investigating complaints against police officers".⁷³ In 1968 two cases of corruption had been revealed by The People⁷⁴, prompting the Sunday Mirror, fired by the beginning of The Times inquiry, to argue that such incidents were "not isolated", and that "It is wrong that accusations that shake the very foundations of public credibility, should not be subject to independent inquiries".⁷⁵ But this was merely the beginning for the British Police.

In 1969, there began the most serious crisis of public confidence in the police since the war, a series of corruption and misconduct scandals which would subsequently be dubbed "The fall of Scotland Yard". This "fall" was in fact three separate scandals between 1969 and 1972. In November 1969 The Times

published a front page exposé on the activities of three London detectives, two from Scotland Yard (Detective Inspector Bernard Robson and Detective Sergeant Gordon Harris) and one from Camberwell (Detective Sergeant John Symonds) who had been involved in bribery and corruption, taking money to allow some criminals a free hand, and being paid by certain criminals to prosecute others. But it was not this which made the case a sensation. In the carefully taped conversations between the informer who had led the journalists concerned (Julian Mounte and Garry Lloyd) to these corrupt officers, intimations had been made of a much wider corruption in the Metropolitan Police, of "a little firm in a firm", to quote Symonds, who was at the time offering the informer, Michael Perry (who was known in the articles concerned as Michael Smith) a wide range of "services", in return for graft amongst a web of corrupt officers which ran throughout the metropolitan force. There ensued two internal investigations, one by Scotland Yard, which was branded a cover up by the press, and which had as its head Bill Moody, an officer whose own corruptions, to be revealed in the coming years, would make those of Symonds, Harris and Robson look mild, and one headed by Chief Constable Frank Williamson of the Cumbria Force, which was so obstructed and sabotaged by Scotland Yard that Williamson resigned from the police force in disgust at the close of the investigation. Finally the three detectives were sent for trial. Two, Robson and Harris, after a long, public and bitterly acrimonious trial were sentenced to seven and six years respectively, whilst Symonds, who would have gone the same way, jumped bail and fled the country⁷⁶, finally returning in 1981 to be imprisoned.⁷⁷ While The Times Inquiry, as it subsequently became known, was still receiving publicity, there

began, in late 1970 and early 1971, a series of events which would lead to the collapse of the career of Detective Chief Inspector Vic Kelaher, one of Scotland Yard's rising stars, as head of the Drug Squad one of the Yard's youngest and most admired heads of department and an officer with a wide reputation, perhaps gained from his apprenticeship with the Flying Squad, for flamboyance and unorthodox methods. After a series of "busts" by customs officers, Kelaher was found to be involved in serious misconduct, involving the recycling of drugs and falsifying of record books. He, and six other members of the twenty-strong drug squad went on trial for drugs recycling and perjury and Kelaher and three others, including his second in command, were found guilty. There remained the strong suspicion, with considerable evidence to substantiate it, that Kelaher had actually been involved in drug trafficking himself, but he was never convicted of this.⁷⁸ Finally, the stories of corruption which had been vaguely rumoured since as early as 1968 around the Obscene Publications Squad, led to the exposure of the entire squad, and part of the Flying Squad, as being actively involved in the massive profit-making of Soho pornography racketeers. It was revealed that bribery on an absolutely massive scale, both in terms of the number of officers and the sums of money involved had occurred, and another long and costly trial saw a large number of detectives sent down, most notably Detective Sergeant Bill Moody, the head of the OPS, and Commander Wallace Virgo, the most senior Scotland Yard officer ever to be convicted, each of whom received twelve years for their part in an absolutely outrageous scandal.⁷⁹

Despite the massiveness of this last scandal, it was

perhaps the first two years of scandal, especially 1969, which had "forc[ed] a previously impervious public to absorb the fact that many London plain clothes men were very probably bent"⁸⁰, that had the most impact. It is not surprising then, that in this year a large number of major London productions of modern plays would take as their central issue police corruption and misconduct. Kerensky notices this common theme of 1969, and attributes it to "the mysterious zeitgeist which causes contemporary writers to pick similar or even identical themes"⁸¹, but I am more inclined to see the coinciding productions of comedies about the police such as Brenton's Revenge and Christie in Love, Gray's Dutch Uncle, and Terson's Fuzz (which has no published text, but was by all accounts considerably more critical of the police than Zigger Zagger), and other comedies with prominently featured dishonest policemen, as a direct response to an issue of importance which had suddenly become very topical.

To the dramatists of this time, the incidents of 1968 to 1972 seemed to illustrate most strongly the fact that so close had become the association of policemen and criminals that the two were virtually indistinguishable. This is very evident in Howard Brenton's Revenge (1969)⁸², where the two protagonists, Adam Hepple and Archibald MacLeish, ex underworld Kingpin and fanatically religious Assistant Commissioner respectively are, Brenton specifies, to be played by the same actor (p.31). "They are" Bull tells us, "two sides of the same coin",⁸³ and the obsessive behaviour of both manifests itself in scenes of high farce amongst the "offsiders" of each. The mutually destructive relationship between MacLeish and Hepple is expressed in terms of a love affair at times, as when Hepple explains that MacLeish

"deflowered my criminal virginity and he's been doing it ever since" (p.8). This intimacy is reflected in their shared obsession with Al Capone - for Hepple, an icon of criminal achievement, and for MacLeish a paragon of all that is evil, and as such fascinating. Just as Hepple declares himself "a life-long admirer of the works of Al Capone" at the beginning of the play (p.7), so MacLeish instructs his wife to read from Capone's works (!) in order to fulfil his need of spiritual refreshment at the end (p.51). Indeed, during the course of the play, MacLeish at times seems a more effective Capone than Hepple, since whilst Hepple's cohorts suspect that "his Al Capone fantasies are just a front" (p.24), MacLeish's worship seems more sincere. Thus, like Capone, he won't shave until he has seen his quarry dead (p.37). All this talk of gangs and gang leaders serves to remind us of that other massively publicised police affair of 1969, the fall of the spectacular criminal empire of the Kray gang. In Hepple's delusions of grandeur there are quite obvious and deliberate allusions to the mother's boys and dog lovers of the Kray and Richardson gangs:

HEPPLE: I'll have another gang, mean and deadly,
eyes of steely blue, biceps like wires. Men
without a moral sense of responsibility. Vicious
and smiling. A fancy shirted lot with a love of
cats and kiddies, but a murderous knowledge of
knives. I'll have 'em again. (p.11)

But the "Adam Hepple Super Gang" proves to be as bathetic as the character from whom it takes its name, for Hepple finishes up with Rot, "a parasite on the criminal classes", an informer and one who has "sold [his] grandma up and down the river so often she thinks she's a fish" (p.11) and Bung, who is barely able to

grunt his monosyllabic threats until a knock on the head leaves him with the acute and unique disability of being able to recite the poetry of e. e. Cummings (pp.42-43). MacLeish, on the other hand, despite his religious mania (he believes himself to be one of the predestined 144,000 - p.38) or perhaps because of it, is a more effective criminal than his "alter ego", and the violent zeal of the police he commands by example is much more like the Krays or Richardsons than anything Hepple can muster. PC George speaks of the police as "Mad with zeal, knights in shining armour", when a policeman is killed, who "slash out left and right arresting all in sight" (p.33). It is worthwhile comparing black comedy on television at this time to a play like Revenge. One of the earliest Monty Python's Flying Circus black satires was the "Doug and Dinsdale Pirhana"⁸⁴ show (circa 1970), which was clearly based on the outrageous excesses and final capture of Ronnie and Reggie Kray. Initially the police are implicitly criticised for failing to take action - their activities consist mainly of adopting disguises, going on holidays and reading the colour supplements - until, "in a fit of pique" the Pirhanas napalm Cheltenham, and "even the police sat up and took notice". At ^{first} chief investigator, Detective Sergeant Harry "Snapper" Organs of the Yard (arguably an allusion to, or at least loosely based upon the kind of officer represented by D.S. Harry Challenor, or D.S. "Nobby" Pilcher, Kelaher's right hand man) seems more doltish than dishonest. Later, his relationship with Doug and Dinsdale seems uncomfortably friendly, as was Wally Virgo's with the Richardson gang, particularly "Mad" Frankie Fraser, whose speciality was "minor" punishment of those who had crossed the Richardson gang, by pulling out their teeth with pliers.⁸⁵ In the end though, no

actual accusation of corruption against Sergeant Organs occurs, and the programme ends with a piece of Simpsonish metatheatre, when a member of the Pirhana gang invades the studio and threatens the presenter, perhaps leaving us to speculate about exactly how he came to be free. Perhaps he has been assisted by the local Chief Constable, who had earlier in the show, assisted the Pirhana brothers in threatening a club owner, by carrying Doug's tactical nuclear missile for him. Again, the predominant concern of the satirists here seems to be closeness of association between the police and criminals leading to corruption, very much a topical issue.

But returning to Revenge, it is an element of ritual in MacLeish's fervent upholding of the status quo which is most menacing about the character. In one deeply ritualised scene, he kneels to pray as George beats Rot, who had, in fact, already offered to inform without the beating. Rot then "repents" as MacLeish puts it, and prays with George and MacLeish, getting an additional kicking from George for neglecting to say "Amen" (pp.40-41). MacLeish's religion is a means of establishing a psychological contact with the golden past, which as a police officer he seeks, since there was also a "golden age" when relations between the police and the public were more harmonious. In the period from the late 1960s onwards, the police had become increasingly hostile to a public it felt to be unsympathetic to its problems, and had begun to complain about the limitations placed upon their capacity to operate efficiently by civil libertarians. In Revenge, however, the nature of the complaints are seen to be a plea to be able to instigate MacLeish's tactics, which are "diabolical, brutal and cruel and not standard police procedure" (p.37), in his words,

rather than to allow orthodox investigation. For MacLeish, the golden past is one of an Old Testament style brutality, and for this he needs to go back a long way:

MACLEISH: A truly godfearing experience to be a
copper in the Middle Ages. No namby pambying.
Lop the thieving hand, pluck the offending eye.
Burn! Burn! There were avenging angels then.
Law was divine . (p.41)

George's golden past is more recent, but just as brutal. He complains that he is no longer allowed to bash criminals because the comprehensive school education has made them too aware of their rights, unlike the old days when a criminal would "expect" the police to "knock him around, tread on his toes, call him names and punch his navel no matter how big he was". Bitterly George threatens to "bugger off to Rhodesia or South Africa. At least it's clear there who you have to bash. Eh, Albert"?⁸⁶ (p.18). PC Albert agrees. In fact, as we have seen, George is still not short of criminals to beat. It is perhaps significant here, that in 1970, New Society published an article revealing that a significantly larger number of police with "low moral" were complained against by the public⁸⁷, and that a large number of diverse and extremely respected organisations had, since the early sixties, been pointing with concern to a decline in "the relationship of the police to the public".⁸⁸

"The general public", says the Inspector in Christie in Love⁸⁹ (1967), "is a dirty animal", a remark representative of the hostility of police to public in such plays and of their resentment of any intrusion into police matters. In After Magritte⁹⁰ (1970), Foot articulates the resentment of the detective of any public questioning of its affairs in his cry of

"I didn't do twenty years of hard grind to have my brains picked by every ignorant layman who finds out I'm a copper" (p.31). It is the same reasoning which leads George to seek the exclusion of the public from the sight of the dead PC Albert. "GEORGE: I'll cordon back the general public. Keep their dirty eyes off/MACLEISH: No. Maybe the sight will move their stony hearts" (p.31). The police are an insular, secretive organisation in the plays of the late sixties and early seventies and it is significant that two of the most important plays about the police in 1969 should evoke comparisons of the police to the priesthood and the church. There is not only the figure of MacLeish, that self-described "man of god" (p.52), but also the appropriately named Detective Inspector Mannerly Hawkins in Gray's Dutch Uncle, whose strict catholic upbringing leads him to believe that "There's not the difference[.]between the vocation of ^{the} priest and the vocation of policeman" that people think (p.72). His, he says, is a life of "devotion, a lonely life given up to salvation" (p.89). He is a deeply religious man, who sees God's inexplicable hand in the solving of crimes (pp.92-93), as does MacLeish. Hawkins' image of godliness is contributed to by Godboy, who idolises him specifically, and the police in general, defending their every liberty as a protection of his own, leading him into a series of Ortonesque aphorisms in their defence. "You can't understand the workings of murder until you understand the workings of the police. The two things are connected", (p.27) is his philosophy. It is this sense of the ignorance of the outsider which Hawkins (like Truscott) exploits so freely. Sir Robert Mark regarded the retention of internal power, and freedom from outside interference by public and politicians as a higher priority for the police force than

the combatting of terrorism⁹¹, and whilst some arguments tended to favour his belief, the police became, through what was seen as an obsession with concealment in an archaic, insular administrative structure, the target of satirists, who would employ farce, the natural vehicle for attacks upon those obsessed with secrecy, in their exposure of such iniquities. The police, according to Gray and Brenton, for example, are increasingly like the church in their drawing upon occulted traditions as a source of power. The "golden past" is spoken of in these terms by PC George, who complains that "Traditions don't go for much nowadays" (p.18), whilst Gray gives plausibility to Godboy's attitude to Hawkins by setting Dutch Uncle in 1952, a much better time for the police. This constant harking back to the past seems to be a sharp attack on the picture of the police which had been presented by the Royal Commission of 1962, in which "we are constantly taken back into the past, for which the Commission has great respect...[...] mesmerised by verbiage and hollow phrases".⁹² Further, it was a traditional, rather glamourised view of the police, having little relationship with contemporary attitudes⁹³ which formed the basis of the 1964 Police Act.

Archaic ritual and gesture are the basis of power for the police in our period, but they were no strangers to impropriety and reversal of established customs in the drama under consideration. I have already detailed the inherent absurdity of immorality laws, particularly pertaining to homosexual offences, and this was heavily criticised. Portrayal of the police's role in this area focussed particularly on the voyeuristic nature of the enforcing of such laws. The case of the arrests of John Lennon and Yoko Ono in 1968 on drugs charges

by a squad headed by the notorious D.S. Nobby Pilcher attracted particular attention at the time. Here, Lennon and Ono, both naked, were suddenly confronted by six policemen and two dogs⁹⁴ climbing through their bedroom window, the police were merely made to look foolish and intrusive, acting only to provide Lennon "with material for a famous party piece". At the early stage of 1967, Orton included a reference to voyeurism of police and officialdom in the behaviour of Commissioner Hogg and Mayor Scullion, who seem to have been peering with binoculars and interest, into the room of McTurk in condemning him for his immorality (Up Against It - 1967 - p.4).⁹⁶ Over the next five years, the image of policemen as voyeurs became endemic to satirical theatre. In After Magritte, Tom Stoppard takes up the cudgels by confronting his audience with a bizarre and alarming spectacle at lights up, when the three member Harris family are all strangely positioned and dressed, and are being peered at through their lounge room window by a policeman, who remains staring through the window until Thelma notices him, and draws the curtains, commenting "bloody nerve!" (pp.10-15). This does not deter the PC, who then becomes the object of a farcical misunderstanding when the curtains are opened and he reappears (pp.15-16). It is the image of police intrusion upon private sexual practices which brings out an element of satire in Stoppard's Jumpers⁹⁷ (1972), when George calls the police to his wife's party, claiming naughty goings-on, later explaining to Bone "I thought a suggestion of immorality might get the police around more quickly than mere exuberance" (p.47). So too, in Wilson's The Pleasure Principle, Robert sees a hole in the wall of Gale's bedroom and proceeds to walk in on Gale and Alko, who are naked and in the middle of an "intimate moment", with the

remark: "You think I should be locked up, don't you. You can't just go swanning around breaking into people's houses. Not unless you're a policeman" (p.54). Voyeurism is also the *modus operandi* of the second policeman in Barker's Claw. He hears Noel and Angie making love in the bushes, and "lies on his stomach and belly crawls towards the edge of the bushes " p.190) where he eavesdrops, making notes in his notebook. But ^{it} is the energy of Brenton's comic invention which provides us with the most memorable scene of police voyeurism of the period. In Revenge, PCs George and Albert are outside MacLeish's house, while Hepple, Rot and Bung are concealed in the bushes:

GEORGE: That's where he lives, God bless him.

ALBERT: It's a lovely house.

GEORGE: That's the reward of fighting the good fight against wickedness. You fight the good fight against wickedness and you'll end up with a house like that.

ROT sneezes. The Policemen look at each other.

GEORGE nods to ALBERT to step back.

They step back.

GEORGE: I think there's something going on in the Assistant Commissioner's shrubbery.

ALBERT: Could be lovers.

GEORGE: Could be lovers. Though it's a disgusting thought, lovers in the Assistant Commissioner's shrubbery.

ALBERT: It is disgusting.

GEORGE: It's disgusting, alright. Let's have a peep. (pp.27-28)

The heavy irony is that the two officers have been engaged in "public immorality" only two scenes ago. As George approaches Liz and Jane, ostensibly to solicit their services as informers, Liz offers to "turn a trick" for him, but George declines with a revealing "not tonight" (p.21). As George and Liz discuss Hepple's whereabouts, Albert seizes Jane and begins to kiss her passionately, eventually becoming so carried away that he "throws her down, himself upon her" (pp.21-22), at which point George cautions him to "steady on". The association of police and prostitutes seems to be a business relationship in two senses, as it does in Claw, where the first policeman pays Noel a pound for the services of Nora, and upon returning beats him up and takes back his pound (pp.145-147). Hawkins became the "Dutch Uncle" of Hedderley some years before the setting of the play of that name, when she seems to have been a prostitute (p.82). Of one of Christie's victims the constable of Christie in Love remarks "Just a scrubber. Twenty-six. Tits a bit worn. The rest of her a bit worn. A very ordinary bint. I wouldn't have minded a go. I mean, if she weren't a rotting corpse I'd have, perhaps, chanced my arm" (p.47). These persistent associations between policemen and prostitutes were perhaps not unrelated to the outrageous tales which had begun to surface about the Metropolitan OPS as early as 1968, and had become almost a media circus by 1971. Amongst the activities of the squad was the officer who, in lieu of bribes, accepted the services of a prostitute run by the pornographers bribing him.⁹⁸ There was also the story of "Big Jeff" Phillips, who supplied girls free of charge for a party of another "dirty squad" officer⁹⁹ and of the bribing of senior officers of both the OPS and Flying Squad with, amongst other things, girls.¹⁰⁰ There

was also the case which was an early blow to the career of Vic Kelaher, when he was caught "in embarrassing circumstances" with a prostitute and another man in a London flat being raided by customs officers for uncustomed jewels. Worst still for Kelaher, the prostitute had been the wife of a man whom he had gaoled four years before.¹⁰¹ The scenario sounds very much like that of Dutch Uncle, where Hawkins seduces Dorrie (pp.90-92) then arrests her husband, freeing his hand with the young woman (pp.92-94). These events were very much in keeping with the feeling of the age, expressed particularly by the tabloid newspapers, where the power of the policeman was such that he is enabled to invade, and prevail upon, the private world of husbands and wives.

But it was not merely a double standard in the policing of "conventional" sexuality which was observed by the media in our period, and it is the genuine "sex scandal" cases which the playwrights of the darkly comic seemed to particularly enjoy attacking. In What The Butler Saw, we saw an early example of this, when Prentice becomes the mouthpiece for a minor dig at police morality: "PRENTICE: You imagine you'll be safe from acts of indecency in a police station? GERALDINE: Of course. PRENTICE: I wish I shared your optimism" (p.410). It was certainly not unknown for policemen to be convicted of homosexual offences in the latter part of our period. One notable case was that of a senior officer, D.I. Peter Low of the Lanarkshire Constabulary attached to the Scottish Crime Squad, who was found guilty of gross indecency with Alexander MacLeod (an informer), and discharged from the police force after twenty-one years of service.¹⁰² The funny, but extremely grim Christie in Love portrays two policemen who, Brenton seems to

suggest, are as capable of perversion as their necrophiliac suspect:

INSPECTOR: Pleasures of the General Public. You see them all, all the fads. How some like it hot, some like it cold. How some like it live and some like it dead. And sometimes, why, your own fancy is tickled. (p.35)

The placing of such speeches in their comic context demonstrates Brenton's power to evoke a horror much more effective than the bawdy "carry on" style double entendres uttered so frequently by Hawkins to the female characters of Dutch Uncle. The sexual suggestion surrounding the constable's "bone", in fact a part of one of Christie's victims, buried in his garden, seems more shocking because of the relentless sense of sordid and quotidian reality of the play, of the copper's missus, of the dirty jokes between the two lumpenproletariat officers (pp.29-35) of the Jeyes fluid put to the end of concealing the smell of corrupted flesh (pp.41-42), of the "plims" in which Christie passes through society "like a ghost" (p.48), and of cups of tea consumed after the murder of women (p.52). Further strength is added by the documentary material on Christie, and the cataloguing of contemporary attitudes to the police. Dutch Uncle also provides a contemporary view of the police from a less than sympathetic, liberal viewpoint, and a character who is clearly based on Christie, the ex special constable of the war (p.14), who offers to do a semi-literate neighbour's wife a medical favour (in this case, an issue is skirted by the farcical substitution of a chiropidist's operation for an abortion), in order to take sexual advantage, who also wishes to murder his wife by gassing her and claiming that she has gone

away (p.28). But the dialogue and stage action is perhaps a little too much like a standard popular farce. Having assembled the materials for almost the archetypal black comedy of its period, Gray proceeds to burden us with the commedia dell'arte figures of the impotent husband, oversexed wife, and pistol-like "captain" and with double entendres involving a "chopidist" who wishes to "have a fling" with his patient, of Eric having a quick one (dance) with May, of Godboy wishing to "do for" (operate on) Doris, of his not having "anything coming up" for May but a "throbbing" for Dorrie's "seize" (all this in one randomly selected short scene - the party of Godboy, May, Dorrie and Eric - pp.22-24). There are also the persistent innuendos involving masturbation, adultery and indecent exposure in Hawkin's initial introduction to the Godboys and the Hoydons (pp.37-40), a phenomenon which is continued with Hawkins' every moment on stage. All this amounts to is farce which divorces a factual background in favour of the phantasmagorial world of pure farce. One cannot help but imagine Sid James as Godboy, Joan Sims as May, and Kenneth Williams as Hawkins, so that in Gray's terms, we can see what he's trying to pull off, but does he come up with anything? Certainly he does not achieve the effectiveness of Orton's quotidian farces, which are clearly his model. The play mocks lust, as does Orton, but does not celebrate fulfilment in the manner of (for instance) Loot.

The joke dealing with the rights of entry of policemen to private premises which I quoted earlier from Wilson's The Pleasure Principle is quite representative of its era. The question of police powers and civil rights became prominent at roughly the same time as the scandals of post-1968. The Lennon

affair, which I have already referred to, provided New Society with the occasion to urge in its readers "unremitting scrutiny" of the extension of police powers, pointing to the continuing and accelerating extension of such powers over recent years, and particularly to the Dangerous Drugs Act, 1965.¹⁰³ This was old hat to civil libertarians, who had been campaigning for the act's repeal since its introduction a year before.¹⁰⁴ The act provided greater power for police officers to arbitrarily stop and search suspects than any previous legislation.¹⁰⁵ Already, by 1969, less than two years after it had come into law, a Home Office committee to investigate the new powers had been set up under the chairmanship of the conservative MP, William Deedes, who saw fit to warn officers, as part of his findings, not to allow colour, hairstyle or dress of suspects to dictate searches for drugs.¹⁰⁶ There had also been a decline in the emphasis on "reasonable suspicion" in the detention of suspects.¹⁰⁷ Stop and search laws and wrongful arrest are given a certain amount of attention in the farces of the time. In Dutch Uncle, Doris speaks of being detained for no reason by the police, who proceed to strip search her at the station (p.27), while the man peeping at her through the keyhole of the charge room (we are given a detailed recollection by Doris after Godboy asks her "how far did they authorise themselves to go?"), proves to be Hawkins, in the by now familiar role of policeman/voyeur (p.92).

The powers of arrest which police officers held tended to be most stringently exercised against those in opposition to the status quo, and with rapidly diminishing motivation as 1970 drew nearer. In 1969, there was a great deal of concern expressed in the press over the treatment of anti-apartheid protestors

during the mass demonstrations of that summer.¹⁰⁸ In the early 1970s with the Angry Brigade bombings, and the more serious IRA campaigns in London and Birmingham, the police were accused of persecuting organisations of the left entirely unconnected with the criminals sought, merely in order to gain access to information on membership and policy.¹⁰⁹ One need look only as far as The Ruling Class for a reflection of this situation in black comedy, where Tucker's arrest for murder is based largely upon his political convictions.

After the passing of the Criminal Damages Act, 1971, which still further extended police powers of entry into private premises, the former Attorney General, Sir Elwyn Jones expressed a concern which had been pervasive in liberal intellectual circles for some time: "It is dangerous for the law to be couched in such terms as to encourage fishing expeditions by police into houses for a general look and search in the hope of finding something."¹¹⁰ The press in this period is full of reports of unwarranted police intrusion, particularly with regard to search laws (barely a week went by without a massively publicised bust on a rock-star or celebrity notable, these frequently resulting in rows about intrusion into private premises)¹¹¹, and it is this which furnishes our dramatists with a potent and recurrent image. The dramatic metaphor of intrusion is, of course, one of the most powerful images available to the dramatist, and it is this which is exploited with satiric effect in a great many comedies, particularly those involving the police, from 1968 to 1974. Again and again officers, particularly detectives, are seen to make unwarranted intrusions upon private premises. In Dutch Uncle, Hawkins is able to conduct a warrantless search of Eric and Dorrie's

apartment by appealing to Eric's conservative sensibilities, having invented an elaborate but transparent subterfuge (as one would expect in a farce) of allowing Hedderley to use his toilet, adding, when he finds that this does not necessitate entry into Eric's apartment, that Hedderley would need the front door key, so she can wash her hands in the Hayden's sink ("there's great stress in the force on personal hygiene" - p.86). Eric can only obey when Hawkins asks truculently: "Now sir, you wouldn't be one of those citizens who demands a search warrant from an officer desperate for a toilet?" (p.86). Eric isn't, but Tom Stoppard is, or at least was at this time. In After Magritte, having already endured the voyeurism of PC Holmes, the Harrises are forced to suffer Inspector Foot of the Yard, who busts into their home and begins an aggressive questioning, which like those of his theatrical antecedents, Truscott, Hawkins and the Inspector of Christie in Love, sets the suspect on the defensive by intimidating and attacking them. When Harris recovers his senses, he asks Foot:

Just a minute. Have you got a search warrant?

FOOT: Yes.

HARRIS: Can I see it?

FOOT: I can't put my hand to it at the moment.

HARRIS: (*Incredulous*) You can't find your search warrant?

FOOT: (*Smoothly*) I had it about my person when I came in. I may have dropped it. Have a look round, Holmes. (pp.26-27)

He searches for a while, but is finally forced to admit: "To tell you the truth, sir, I'm not absolutely sure what a search warrant looks like"(p.29). Similarly, in Jumpers, Bones of the

Yard, the CID man who visits George: "acts as if he owns the place" (p.45) after he is admitted to the Moore house, completely ignoring George's attempts to show him out. George's "an Englishman's home is his castle" falls on deaf ears (p.49) as Bones, like Foot before him, through a series of verbal contretemps, makes Stoppard's satiric point about police misconduct in Britain. "The law is implacable", Foot tells George, "It makes no distinction between rich and poor"¹¹², famous and anonymous, innocent and- I mean..."(p.45). The first performance of Jumpers in February, 1972 came at the very height of the OPS and Drugs Squad scandals¹¹³ as well as coinciding with a campaign by civil libertarians against illegal detention.¹¹⁴ One phrase which was particularly objectionable to some sections of the public at this time was "helping the police with their inquiries", a byword for many journalists for detention without charge, a pragmatically necessary police procedure, but one which from about 1970 onwards became the subject of a series of widely publicised abuses both in cases involving groups (anti-apartheid demonstrators, black rioters and feminist demonstrators in 1970 alone) and individuals (such as Susan Quayle in April, 1970 and Robert Prescott in February 1971). It is perhaps this which leads Stoppard to put another bomb into the mouth of Bones:

GEORGE: Perhaps I can help you.

BONES: In my inquiries, you mean, or just generally? Think carefully before you answer. If it gets about that you're helping me *in my inquiries* bang goes your credit in the off-licence for a start.

(p.44)

Detention without charge also figures in Revenge, when Rot, who

has already been detained, offers to "help [the Police] with enquiries" (p.41), and in England's Ireland (1971), although here it pertains specifically to the powers of arrest and detention available to police and soldiery in Ulster.

But returning to Stoppard, why should such a socially uncommitted (and, more recently, right-wing) dramatist take up police misconduct in his plays? It would certainly be inaccurate to say that Jumpers was a play "about" police misconduct, for the satire, although pointed, is ultimately incidental to the play as a whole. Stoppard himself stressed that "Jumpers ^{which obviously} isn't a political act, nor is it a play about politics, nor is it a play about ideology. There is an element in it which satirises a joke-fascist outfit, but you can safely ignore that, too".¹¹⁵ Presumably then, we are also to ignore the satire of the police. But why is it there? Part of the answer lies, I think, in Nicholas De Jongh's contemporary review of After Magritte, which gives as a strength of this display of verbal pyrotechnics and technical deftness the fact that "there is always some small hold on reason".¹¹⁶ Part of the capacity for attaining the "reason" of this "nuts and bolts comedy", as Stoppard described it¹¹⁷, is by connection with the political world outside, with the "realities" of the newspapers and the discussion points of the middle classes. In the outrageous behaviour of the contemporary policeman, Stoppard could have his cake and eat it, allowing Foot to propel the freewheeling farce, as well as making him a figure who, if he is not exactly realistic, is at least an eminently recognisable and contemporary grotesque. Jumpers, with its dead body, corrupt government, shonky copper and possibly adulterous psychiatrist, is as "black" as Stoppard comes, and in his portrayal of Bones,

he seems to be almost a satirist of the Augustan kind - an essentially conservative man, driven to condemn, almost against his will, the excesses of a group. Admittedly, there's not so much "savae" in his "indignatio" as there could be, but it is testament to the kind of media attention the police received in this period that Stoppard should make them the satiric target in a black farce.

Stoppard's policemen are caricatures of the Dixon of Dock Green type, and so too are many of the officers in the plays I have mentioned. The two PCs of Revenge introduce themselves with a reassuring "evening all" (p.17) and give their audience the impression of a solid, middle-aged, rather fatherly crime fighter and his eager young partner, exactly the same routine as is involved with Cox and Payne of Nichols' The Freeway, at whom the other characters laugh at "as at a much-loved television series" (p.23). It is not until later that the Rot sets in, when both sets of officers are seen to be guilty of a number of appalling offences. So too, in Mannerley Hawkins, we are presented with a father figure, who refers to Eric as "son" and "boy" and who paradoxically speaks of him as a man in need of his "comfort". The other kind of comfort is provided for Dorrie, to whom Hawkins is a "dutch uncle" (p.94) of the title, just as he has been to Hedderley before her (p.82), an officer who he has "made" (p.71). The fatherly policeman in Claw calls Noel "son", but proceeds to beat him insensible (p.146). The father and son routine is also used in Christie in Love, in the inspector and the constable before they reveal their "perversion" (for example, p.35). The technique in these paradoxical images of traditional police solidity contrasted with the "facts" of police misconduct in the "real world" is one of bathos. Just as

the authorities had, in the Royal Commission on the police, drawn on an archaic and apocryphal picture of the police in the community, so the dramatists of 1968 to 1975 attacked the stereotype by presenting Dixon of Dock Green, then allowing him to be seen engaging in all manner of unethical activities. Brenton perhaps articulated the intentions of his fellow dramatists in his stagenotes on Christie In Love's Inspector and Constable:

They are stage coppers. But they have "sudden lights", unpredictable speeches beyond the confines of pastiche. As if a cardboard black and white cut out suddenly reaches out a fully fleshed, real hand. It's a bathos technique[...] It is very cruel. (p.27)

The "fully fleshed hand" is partially created in this and all of the plays by the dislocation of the drama through a connection with contemporary attitudes and events.

One of the most emotive issues of the entire decade in question is that of police brutality. Accusations of police brutality were particularly rife in the period 1969-1971, especially when the police were seen to handle badly the black community, where the problem was exacerbated by the reported alienation of police black liaison officers by their colleagues.¹¹⁸ This, combined with their handling of anti-apartheid demonstrators (discussed above) made the police appear racist. (Stoppard attacks this issue in After Magritte, right in the middle of this public crisis, with Foot's remarks on "bald nigger[s]", Pakistanis and "darkies" - pp.31-33). It is also commented on in Magnificence (1973), where Slaughter excuses his past crimes to the constable by explaining that his

victims were "pakis, that kind of thing" - p.27). It is not surprising then, that the prevalent image of police brutality is of the over-zealous policing of public order offences against those attacking the status quo. Of the political activist Tucker, Brockett says to his offsider: "If he gives you any trouble, Fraser, break his arm" (p.109). In Brenton's The Education of Skinny Spew¹¹⁹ (1969) the image of Skinny, the rebellious youth, having a police dog set on him by an extremely aggressive officer (p.103) would be particularly evocative to an audience who would have been reading of such activities on the morning of their evening at the theatre, in June 1969, and again in April 1970, when the play was given its first professional production. The joke about Mo's father, in Snoo Wilson's Blowjob (1971), who when drunk and disorderly "bit several of them [the arresting policemen] on the truncheon. Face was right out to here (*holds hands in front of face*)" (p.48) is yet another ironic jibe, after yet another summer (the third in succession) of "high profile" public order policing.

Police brutality is also one of the most elemental and frequently used dislocation techniques by dramatists who have set up the stereotypes of the solid, fatherly policeman mentioned earlier. Again and again audiences were confronted with brutality during, or immediately after scenes in which policemen are set up as pillars of the community. So, the policeman who introduces himself with a reassuring "hello, hello, hello" in Brenton's Gum and Goo¹²⁰ (1969), is soon brutalising the dirty old man (pp.67-68), and in Dutch Uncle, Hawkins describes his religious background at the same time as he has Eric tortured by Hedderley (pp.88-91). A similar effect

is achieved in Christie in Love, where, having brutally murdered Christie, the two policemen remind us of their place in a civilised society:

INSPECTOR: That's that then.

CONSTABLE: Yes sir.

INSPECTOR: Another crime solved.

CONSTABLE: A blow struck for married life.

INSPECTOR: Yes.

CONSTABLE: Yes. (p.53)

The technique involved is similar to the praying and beating scene in Revenge, mentioned above.

The major corruption scandals of the period 1968 to 1972 must have seemed to the public to have exclusively involved senior administrative policemen and detectives, which by and large, would have been a correct analysis. Senior police officers attracted stories such as that propagated by a corrupt Edinburgh businessman, Robert Freu Blair, who had, in 1969 claimed to be responsible for the appointment of Lanarkshire's chief constable,¹²¹ and headlines such as (in the OPS case) "Police Chief and Porno King"¹²² and "Let's Open up a Brothel, Says Chief Constable"¹²³. It is notable then, that the officers who were subject to corruption in the comedies of this time, were almost invariably detectives. Indeed, in all of the major plays we have been discussing only a few uniformed officers are given parts of significance. In Brenton's Revenge, the uniformed PC George is honest (although brutal) and his relatively senior age for a constable of 41 (p.22) is explained when Hepple sees him for the first time in eight years: "HEPPLE [It's] George, in't it? Still on the beat?/ROT:: Too honest for promotion" (p.19). Perhaps the most revealing of minor business

involved in the period occurs in Orton's Funeral Games. Orton completed the play at the relatively happy time for police of November, 1966¹²⁴, but it was not produced until August, 1968 -- over a year after Orton's death and in a very different period for policemen, especially detectives. It is significant, then, that despite Orton's script, which specifies that the honest officers who restore order at the end of the play should be plain clothed (p.360), they are, it is evident from the production stills in the Diaries¹²⁵, and Charney's book on Orton¹²⁶, presented in uniform in the original production.

The man given the task of cleaning up the metropolitan police after the "fall of Scotland Yard" in April, 1972, Sir Robert Mark, was unsurprisingly a "Mr Clean" figure, who had been in charge of the uniformed branch of the Met. His task was to break the corrupt power of the CID, by "establish[ing] the supremacy of the uniformed branch"¹²⁷, and he did this with determination and efficiency. Mark was an intellectual, of comparatively liberal outlook for a police officer.¹²⁸ He did not mince words in describing his predecessors as "intellectually or otherwise incapable" of expressing public opinions about police matters,¹²⁹ as well as remarking in 1972 that the London CID had become "the most routinely corrupt organisation in London"¹³⁰, and in doing so won few friends amongst the old establishment forces of law and order in Britain. In the two years following his appointment 302 officers left the Metropolitan Police by dismissal, requirement to resign or "voluntary resignation in anticipation of criminal proceedings or to forestall disciplinary action".¹³¹ Mark can be credited with a marginal improvement of the battered image of the force by creating "the new force" and with mounting a

substantial attack of real integrity on police corruption. Mark also continued a vociferous opposition to police brutality, which he had publicly deplored, at least by implication, as early as 1965.¹³²

But "the new force" did not (unlike the Royal Commission of 1962 and subsequent Police Act of 1964) "take the heat off" the police in the eyes of the contemporary British drama. The assault on the "new force" was led, almost inevitably, by Howard Brenton, in Magnificence (1973). The stereotype of Dixon of Dock Green is replaced, in the character of the uniformed constable with the stereotype of the officer of the "new force". The constable is liberal-minded and moderate (he brands the young people's chanting of maoist slogans as "fanatacism" - p.22), as well as being something of an "intellectual". He presents the appropriately named bailiff, Slaughter, with a liberal humanist explanation of crime, war "and all other irrational behaviour" adding "although there is another theory" (p.23), and seems quite prepared to condemn, albeit tactfully, Slaughter's brutality. "I know you think I am corrupt" (p.26) says Slaughter to the constable, and clearly he does, but he is really in no position to judge. Brenton strips away the mask of civility on the policeman by showing that the constable's thought ("The Chief Constable likes us to keep abreast intellectually" - p.26) is a collection of tatty pop-cultural theories such as the crackpot belief that we are all a martian experiment gone wrong and that Jesus was "one of 'em", ascending to heaven via "anti-gravity drive (pp.23-24) - a very contemporary reference, at the beginning of the "Chariots of the Gods" craze. What is also very topical and more relevant to our discussion, is Slaughter's response to the theory, and the

exchange which follows it:

SLAUGHTER: What a load of cock.

CONSTABLE: Yeh. A Russian scientist believes ⁱⁿ it, though.

SLAUGHTER: The Force has become highly philosophical since my day.

CONSTABLE: It's our Chief Constable. He's got a degree from Cambridge.

SLAUGHTER: When I was a copper, they were all left-overs from the British Raj. Wonderful men.

CONSTABLE: He's keen on us getting O levels. I got Art. Failed English Language, though.

SLAUGHTER: Thought of leaving?

CONSTABLE: The force?

SLAUGHTER: Made a packet since I did.

CONSTABLE: Did think of being a Security Guard.

But I didn't like the uniform. (p.24)

The constable is clearly not any brighter than Slaughter. He seems to be more interested in the new police motorbikes than policing issues (p.25). Indeed, he is seen as merely the subordinate of Slaughter, who tells him "Don't shuffle constable" and elicits the inadvertent reply of "Sorry sir" (p.28). Ultimately, the constable himself acknowledges the fact that he, of the new force and Slaughter of the old, are on the same side, and it is only the constable's desire to retain a "clean" image which induces him to disassociate himself from Slaughter:

CONSTABLE: See it from my point of view, Mr.

Slaughter. We are both the law, and must act in concert. But you are a private sector,

I am public sector. Er...

(Looks about him. Touches his nose, meaning "savvy") (p.28)

And so, for Brenton, the two are the same, and indeed, later they combine in the absurd "almost apologetic" struggle with Will which culminates in Slaughter's kicking of Mary, who loses her child (p.38). ^{in Brassneck,} When the expediencies of plot and the facts of the Poulson affair force Brenton and Hare to acknowledge the honesty of a certain section of the police force, their existence is highly qualified and contextualised within a corrupt system:

BROWNE: It's gone to the Fraud Squad. The Everest of public relations. The hardest one a PR man can ever be asked to crack. Local police...a little kindness. Judges...a little arselicking. Politicians...a little foreign travel. But the Fraud Squad. The Fraud Squad is outer space. They come from London in XJ12S, wearing oxygen masks. Their eyes are clear blue and when they see "bad" money, they turn aquamarine. (p.93)

The period 1968 to 1972 in particular, then, was a nadir in police public relations. But there was also a period, in the year following November 1963, which almost equalled the extent of public reaction to the police. As with the period we have just discussed, the object of the sudden public unease about the role of the police was a series of scandals, initially involving police brutality, then later allegations of bribery and corruption. Late in 1963 the Rhino Whip affair was still in the

public limelight when Private Eye published a major article on the hitherto unreported death of Herman Woolf, a London artist who was found dead with a fractured skull in a cell of West End central police station after being charged with possession of cannabis. Allegations of police brutality were made and an inquiry failed to find a culprit, although it was heavily critical of police disregard of procedure in a number of crucial areas pertaining to the charge, particularly an illegal search of Woolf's home, the secrecy which surrounded his death, and the police's failure to notify Woolf's relatives either of his arrest or his death.¹³³ In the same month a Glasgow officer, PC Nimmo, was found guilty of manslaughter after a suspect who he had admitted "punching in a momentary loss of temper" died of injuries received in a police cell.¹³⁴ In May, 1964, a ban on reporting of police affairs in the press imposed by William McCormack (who would later be investigated and quietly dismissed, stand trial for stealing as a servant of the Crown, and be found guilty and imprisoned for two years)¹³⁵ Chief Constable of Southend, after some adverse reportage of both himself and his senior officers, was lifted amidst a great deal of protest by the media.¹³⁶ In June, in a much publicised case which I will speak more of later, three officers were found guilty of perverting the course of justice, and a fourth and most senior, Detective Sergeant Harold Challenor was found unfit to plead through insanity.¹³⁷ In October there were the trials of a number of Flying Squad officers for bribery, corruption, demanding money with menaces, intent to steal¹³⁸, and perjury.¹³⁹ Meanwhile the Challenor affair had moved the Home Secretary (at that time Henry Brooke) to, for the first time, utilise the power to invoke a major external inquiry,

which had first been made available to a Home Secretary in 1962, and has been subsequently used only twice - in 1975 when Kevin Gately died in the Red Lion Square affair, and in 1981, with the Scarman inquiry into the Brixton riots.¹⁴⁰ The inquiry was launched after the jury at the June case found that Challenor had been mentally abnormal "for some considerable time"¹⁴¹ and began in September, its main term of reference being to investigate how Challenor had managed to remain on active service "when he appeared to be affected by the onset of mental illness".¹⁴² The revelations of the inquiry marked, at that time, the lowest point in police public relations since the war.

To this crisis, there came a single, memorable response, almost a voice of agit-prop from within the establishment theatre, Joe Orton's Loot. The play would substantially influence the comedies of 1968 and later, which I have already discussed, through its creation of Truscott of the Yard, regarded by one critic as the greatest comic creation since the war¹⁴³, and a policeman whose outline can be seen in a number of the police characters already discussed. Orton began writing the play in the month of Challenor's trial, and completed it towards the end of the inquiry.¹⁴⁴ The play opened at the end of January, 1965¹⁴⁵ in an out of London production. An actor in the original production of Loot, Kenneth Williams, recalled that "Orton was obsessed with Challenor - he never stopped reading the reports and giggling uncontrollably. He said "This man's mad".¹⁴⁶ The first critic to identify Orton's use of Challenor as a model for Truscott was Albert Hunt, but Hunt goes only as far as pointing out that one remark made by Challenor was, word for word, the line which Truscott delivers as he

arrests McLeavy, "You're fucking nicked, my old beauty" (p.273)¹⁴⁷. In the biography of Orton, Lahr extended this by giving a very brief run down of the Challenor affair in his analysis of Loot¹⁴⁸, but no critic has provided a comprehensive examination of the play with particular emphasis on the degree to which Orton drew on the Challenor Affair to affect his audience's attitude to the play in contemporary performance, and to influence his selection of dramatic effect and aesthetic forms. There is most assuredly a place in criticism for such an analysis.

Perhaps the most frequently used dismissal of Orton's satiric technique is that it is too far-removed from any locatable reality in the world outside the theatre to achieve the savagery it intends. Hence Benedict Nightingale says of Loot:

The tone and style of the play [...] tends to undermine Orton's more sombre aspirations. Its characters are gaudy grotesques, mouthing outrageous repartee as they swagger from one improbable situation to another. They are not people who can possibly engage any but our most superficial emotions.¹⁴⁹

This seems to imply that comic grotesquerie is not in fact an effective means of satiric attack. One answer would be to point the critic in the direction of Jonathan Swift, but what of the comic grotesquerie involved in police characters in the comedies of our study? Loot, Taylor says, "is a little arid, a play about plays and conventions rather than a play which is, however remotely about (if you will pardon the word) life"¹⁵⁰, adding that "it lacks the dimension that Mr. Sloane has simply

because [in Entertaining Mr. Sloane] we relate the words and actions of its characters with some recognisable external reality".¹⁵¹ Just as Orton's Truscott is a "puppet" in Taylor's view¹⁵², so Brenton's characters in the early plays were regarded as "strip cartoon" figures.¹⁵³ This was a point to which Brenton strenuously objected, pointing to his police characters in giving an example of why they were "more realistic than is thought".¹⁵⁴

It is certainly true that Truscott is by no means a naturalistic character - he is clearly not intended to be performed as a figure incorporating a great deal of psychological depth, and neither are the other characters. We are, after all, discussing a farce. Such characters would be inimical to a play which parodies the Whodunnit through farce of an entirely new form. What Orton does, is to create a character who, far from being removed from life, incorporates into his grotesquerie a constant harking back upon a person at the centre of a great public affair, of which a contemporary audience could be expected to have knowledge. Certainly, in its original production, audiences seemed to identify the law as one of Orton's satiric targets, and responded appropriately by walking out of the theatre.¹⁵⁵ This production was unsuccessful, and this was believed by Orton to be because of the stylised way in which it was directed by Peter Wood.¹⁵⁶ Certainly, in its initial unsuccessful run, Orton insisted again and again that the play be directed "seriously".¹⁵⁷ When the play was revised after a disastrous death in Manchester and a long pause in which it looked as if it would be forgotten, it opened again in Manchester with a new director, Braham Murray, stressing a naturalistic approach to the play's outrageous farce.¹⁵⁸ This

worked, and a substantial part of the play's success was due to a new approach to the character of Truscott, who became more like Challenor after rewrites. In the original production, Kenneth Williams, who played Truscott, had felt that his performance was as its best when he was allowed to do "the Challenor bit".¹⁵⁹ Michael Bates, the New Truscott, was able to play him the way that Orton wished, "very real". It is notable that in many of the new facets of Truscott's portrayal, we find a strong hint of Challenor. When Bates created the character, "I borrowed a lot from the sergeant majors I knew in the Army - the bellowing and the frozen smiles",¹⁶⁰ said Bates, calling to mind a remark made by Donald Roum, a victim of Challenor, about that officer "[he was] a noisy bullying type of man, like an NCO in the army..."¹⁶¹ A close critical analysis bears out the resemblance of Truscott to Challenor more clearly.

The figure of Truscott of the Yard is one which has its own attendant legend in Loot. Truscott says of himself:

You have before you a man who is quite a personage in his way - Truscott of the Yard. Have you never heard of Truscott? The man who tracked down the limbless girl killer? Or was that sensation before your time? (p.250)

Challenor was not himself a murder squad man, but he had built for himself a considerable reputation. Indeed, he was something of a cult figure, a minor celebrity with the public, and a greatly respected man within the force. The most amusing aspect of the Challenor inquiry for Orton must have been the sheer bathos of a man who is at first idolised by the press, and then, as the distasteful facts emerged in the inquiry, increasingly vilified. In the first report on the inquiry in The Times,

Challenor was described as "an expert thief catcher", whose night duty squad activities are described as "very successful". He is said to have worked long hours and have passed from the Hendon detective school with the excellent grade of 94.5%.¹⁶² In the first few days of the case, his seventeen commendations by the commissioner, his wartime record and the assertion that his "Novel Crime Fighting Methods Succeed[ed]" were quoted by the newspapers.¹⁶³ Senior officers were trotted out to vouch for him. His immediate commander, Detective Superintendent Townsend, claimed that underworld figures were trying to frame him, and that Challenor was "a very shrewd and deep thinking officer who works with energy and purpose; keen competent and loyal".¹⁶⁴ On the day of his retirement, the greatly revered Commander George Hatherill vouched for Challenor's expertise as an officer, and also subscribed to the conspiracy theory of his fall.¹⁶⁵ Challenor was described as a "soho gangbuster" and "a thorn in the side of clip-joint owners".¹⁶⁶ His brutality was also defended at the inquiry, where one officer was recalled to have said to a suspect complaining of being beaten by Challenor: "This is a tough place, and that officer is tougher".¹⁶⁷ On the same theme, Challenor "had a wide reputation for being unbribable", according to his defending solicitor.¹⁶⁸ Amidst all this praise, however, a memo recovered from the period in which Challenor was still on active duty, and widely respected, in September 1963, was most revealing. One of Challenor's senior officers, C.S. James Starrit, wrote of him: "There is no doubt that the Sergeant is well aware of his reputation, of which he is very jealous".¹⁶⁹

It is this piece of memorable understatement which Orton fixed upon as part of the dramatic paradox of Truscott, the

heroic officer whose heroism is in fact an elaborate, carefully construed myth. The overpowering vanity of Truscott, who complains upon discovering a photograph of himself in a book about Fay's past that: "They always choose the worst . . . I can not get them to print a decent picture" (p.253). The appropriate connection is made by Lahr, who remarks that "Truscott's only pure motive is his commitment to his legend" and that Challenor "turned every situation into a spectacle of his own heroism and omnipotence".¹⁷⁰

Reputation and appearance are, of course, the obsessive concern of the characters of Loot. Fay's final remark, "we must keep up appearances" (p.275), which curtains the play, characterises the farce. Dennis is pigeon-holed by Hal as "a very luxurious type of lad"(p.200) and proceeds to fulfil the expectations of the characters around him with revelations of paternity orders (p.244), criminal activities and generally loutish behaviour. Much the same is true of Hal, whilst Fay's reputation as a respectable nurse is never challenged, until Truscott, whose total knowledge and self-knowledge is indicative of the authority he abuses, reveals her to be otherwise. Bigsby argues that the formula for survival presented by Loot is that of the fictionalised self, of reputation as a protection against the monolithic fictions of authority and the state.¹⁷¹ I am inclined to agree with this view, although Bigsby fails to acknowledge the importance of the Truscott/Challenor element in identifying this central theme. The astonishing fact which emerged during the Challenor inquiry was that for the fame of the officer in question with the general public and police force, a mirror image of infamy existed amongst the criminal underworld. Dario Oliva, a nightclub owner

who testified, claimed that Challenor "would not think twice about knocking you off for nothing - about framing you" adding, that he had "a general reputation" for framing.¹⁷² To this, a series of allegations were added about Challenor's "reputation" for misconduct¹⁷³ and brutality.¹⁷⁴ Similarly, Truscott enjoys a reputation as Truscott of the Yard, but is well known in a different way amongst his criminal victims:

HAL: Was it Truscott searched your house?

DENNIS: Yes. And he had me down the station for questioning. Gave me a rabbit punch. No, I'm a liar. A rabbit-type punch.¹⁷⁵ Winded me. Took me by the cobbles. Oh, strewth it made me bad.

HAL: Yes, he has a nice line in corporal punishment. Last time he was here he kicked my old lady's cat and he smiled while he did it. (p.210)

The dualities in Truscott's reputation, and their believability to an audience unable to deny his resemblance to Challenor in this matter, are important in establishing his liquidity of identity, something which is symbolised by his disguise as a water-board inspector. Disguise, or at least impersonation was a weapon in Challenor's armoury for the persecution of the innocent. When one man, who had been falsely arrested and was being illegally detained at West End central, asked to see the superintendent, Challenor had pretended to be that officer, and had told the man he had no grounds for complaint.¹⁷⁶ A similar, more direct technique is used by Truscott after arresting McLeavy:

MCLEAVY: I want to see someone in authority.

TRUSCOTT: I am in authority. You can see me.

MCLEAVY: Someone higher.

TRUSCOTT: You can see whoever you like, providing
you convince me first that you're justified in
seeing them . (p.274)

The uncertainty surrounding the character of Truscott gives him the power to act in a manner which both threatens and manipulates those around him. The element of disguise which is a natural accoutrement of farce is involved, as the concealed from, rather than the concealers, adopts a disguise. As a water board inspector, Truscott is able to gain access to private premises to which the police are not entitled without a warrant. He openly admits this when he reveals what, in this world of metaphysical vagaries, can only tentatively be called his "true identity" (p.251). His excuse to Dennis when he invades the boy's home, that "the water board doesn't issue warrants" (p.211) is brilliant for its psychotic ingenuity. Challenor, incidentally, also had little time for warrants. When one barrister asked for a warrant for the arrest of his client, Challenor refused "and used a vulgar expression"¹⁷⁷, another barrister was still less lucky, for he was punched in the face for asking.¹⁷⁸ This seems to betray a lax attitude to procedure even by West End central police station standards. Such is the terror and confusion that Truscott instills in those around him, that when he finally does reveal his name (he had previously refused to admit to a name, even a christian name, on the grounds that he is "not a practising christian" although he is then forced to admit that "one of my names is Jim" - p.230), McLeavy's response is still angry, frightened perplexity:

What in Hell kind of ^aname is that? Is it an
anagram? You're not bloody human, that's for
sure. We're being made ^{the}victims of some kind

of interplanetary rag. (To Fay) He's probably
luminous in the dark. (p.248)

This last remark is a very pointed reminder of the madness of Challenor, who, whilst on active duty, told his wife that the "special mission" for which he had been training for about a year had been assigned to him not by his superior officers, but by voices from outer space.¹⁷⁹ He was, he claimed, to be "the first policeman on the moon".¹⁸⁰ He would be given a telepathic message to go to Oxford, where he would be picked up in a car and transported to the moon, returning at 4 a.m. the next day.¹⁸¹ Mrs. Challenor might possibly have begun to suspect that something was amiss with her husband at this point. The incident was perfect for Loot, for in it, a character could be allowed to engage in outrageous speculation, yet still keep the audience in mind of the "real" outside world satirised.

Challenor's wife played a significant part in his final exposure as a paranoid schizophrenic. As with Truscott's wife, who never appears in Loot, Mrs. Challenor played a large part in her husband's life and detected his madness long before Scotland Yard. One of the most important pieces of evidence in proving that Challenor had for some considerable time been mentally ill was his wife's account of his cancellation of a holiday to Yugoslavia which had been planned for summer 1963, because he feared that he would be killed by enemy agents.¹⁸² In Loot there is possibly an allusion to this event, with Truscott, who speaks affectionately of his wife on several occasions (for example, p.215). Hal is about to suggest bribery, and Truscott's reference to a holiday remind us of Challenor, whilst his comments about his wife reveal the misogyny which is endemic to him:

HAL: Are you married, Inspector?

TRUSCOTT: Yes.

HAL: Does your wife ever yearn for excitement?

TRUSCOTT: She did once express a ~~wish~~ to see the windmills and tulip fields of Holland.

HAL: With such an intelligent wife you need a larger income.

TRUSCOTT: I never said my wife was intelligent.

HAL: Then she's unintelligent? Is that it?

TRUSCOTT: My wife is a woman. Intelligence doesn't really enter into the matter.

HAL: If, as you claim, your wife is a woman, you certainly need a larger income . (p.270)

The view of Truscott with regard to women, which is expressed in his remark "I always have trouble with the ladies" (p.229), and in his belief that Dennis' comparative ease in the company of women is a "psychological peculiarity" (p.243) is very much of a piece with Orton's world view, for in his plays there is a great deal of misogyny, as has already been noted. This conflict of man and woman is one which also figured prominently in the Challenor case, since Challenor violently assaulted both his wife¹⁸³ and a woman who he had arrested in 1963.¹⁸⁴ After his fall he had told an examining psychiatrist that his wife was in league against him, and added, "with smirks and inappropriate laughter" that "all women were mad".¹⁸⁵

If Challenor's misogyny is part of Truscott's make up, it is clear that his madness fits Truscott with even greater precision. When, as Truscott arrests McLeavy, McLeavy accuses him of being mad, to which Truscott has the perfect reply: "Nonsense. I had a check-up only yesterday. Our medical

officer assured me that I was quite sane" (p.274). This is a clear reference to Challenor, who by late August 1963, after a series of very disturbing pieces of behaviour, even for a West-End detective, was sent to the chief police medical officer for examination, and passed "fit for duty". The medical officer, Sir John Richardson, said in his report to the commissioners "There is nothing to suggest that he should see a psychologist, or that there is anything medical in his situation".¹⁸⁶ In the inquiry, the most sympathetic of all of the examining psychiatrists had placed the beginning of Challenor's illness at "before May 1963"¹⁸⁷, and the consensus of expert opinion had it that the illness had begun much earlier than this, possibly as far back as 1962.¹⁸⁸ Within a few days, a further deterioration in Challenor's condition saw him forced back to see a psychiatrist, who declared: "I am sure that Sergeant Challenor is very mad indeed. I consider him certifiably insane".¹⁸⁹ Still he was allowed to continue on duty although one senior officer had described him as "mental" after his crazed performance after the Greek Royal family demonstration,¹⁹⁰ where he unjustly arrested four demonstrators, and three innocent boys who happened to be passing by at the time, and beat several of them in the cells.¹⁹¹ The reason for his being allowed to continue was expressed by his colleague, Sergeant Etherage: "I did not think much of the psychiatrist business because, quite frankly, a lot of us treat them as a bit of a joke".¹⁹² Challenor was finally suspended in February, 1964, and this was mainly because of the charges of corruption and misconduct which had been laid against him, rather than his dangerous lunacy. For Orton, the answer to the question of how Challenor was able to continue on active service

for so long is simply that in an insane world, insane authority figures are most effective. Loot is, from the start, a very real world, but one in which (like the "real" world) "The man sitting next to you on the bus could be insane" (p.201). McLeavy is the victim of the farcical punishment because of his lack of worldly knowledge: "McLeavy: Is the world mad? Tell me it's not./TRUSCOTT: I'm not paid to quarrel with established facts" (p.258). Truscott's own madness enables him to survive by accepting the obvious insanities of Fay's explanations as "quite reasonable" (p.232), and further, gives him the power to designate deviancy or normality in those around him. Of the woman whose dog attacks McLeavy, he says, "She sounds like an unstable kind of person to me" (p.239). He accuses McLeavy of being "a thoroughly irresponsible individual" (p.262), whose "behaviour indicates a growing lack of control" (p.264). He also, as we have seen, believes Dennis to be psychologically abnormal (p.243) and indeed, wonders whether anyone "in this house [has] any normal feelings" (p.250) (he too, is in the house), remarking of the whole group that "you behave as though you were affiliated to Bedlam" (p.265). His final verdict on the house - "I ought to get my head examined, getting mixed up in a case of this kind" (p.265), brings us back sharply to the historically specific irony upon which the play turns, as Orton wonders at the validity of providing possibly insane individuals with large amounts of arbitrarily wielded power

The coverage of the police and of policing issues by Orton, and the dramatists discussed above, is notable for its specificity and immediateness in addressing the scandals of the day. Aside from providing a considerable armoury of dramatic metaphor, such as the stage business of intrusion of an

authority figure upon traditionally "private" territory, the most noticeable aspect of all of this drama is that it did not define a particular political position for the writers concerned. The inclusion of Stoppard amongst this group of dramatists is important, since it signifies the centrality of topicality to these plays, rather than some positive political intent. This is not to say that the plays of, say, Brenton were not political satire, but that the inclusion of the policeman as a central figure in the black comic canon is at least as much about the technique of black comic social topicality as it is about a political vision. Indeed, the group of dramatists surveyed illustrate a continuity from the "pre-1968" period, since there are common obsessions between dramatists who would later be labelled "radical", "social democrat" or "conservative" by critics of the latter seventies, and eighties.

FOOTNOTES

1. F. Stacey, op.cit. pp.190-200.
2. A.W. Morrison, F.R.S. (Chairman), Report of The Committee of Inquiry Into the Regulation of The Medical Profession (London, 1975), p.76.
3. Ibid. p.78.
4. Ibid. p.1.
5. Ibid. pp.109-110.
6. C.M. Fletcher, Communication In Medicine (London, 1973)
7. Ibid. Idem.
8. Morrison, op.cit. p.110.
9. H. Brenton, B. Clark, T. Griffiths, D. Hare, S. Poliakoff, H. Stoddart and S. Wilson, Lay-By (London, 1972)
10. J. Orton, Collected Plays (London, 1976), pp.193-275.
11. H. Livings, The Little Mrs. Foster Show (London, 1969)
12. There is a great deal of such business in our period - Orton also makes comic ground out of the old routine of the patient's fear of the doctor's needle in What The Butler Saw, with Geraldine's confrontation with Dr. Rance.
13. T. Gallacher, Revival and Schellenbrack (Glasgow, 1976)
14. P. Nichols, The Freeway (London, 1975)
15. L. Lehman, "End of Story", R. Muller (ed), The Television Dramatist. (London, 1973)
16. S. Gray, Dutch Uncle (London, 1969)
17. Roy Jenkins, Essays and Speeches (New York, 1971), pp.262-266.
18. Ibid. p.262.
19. N. Allen, "Abortion 1968", New Society, 18 July, 1968.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. J. Cook, "Intent to Procure", New Statesman, 13 Nov. 1964.
23. Morrison, op.cit. p.87.
24. I. Wardle (ed), New English Dramatists 12: Radio Plays (Harmondsworth, 1968), pp.149-191.
25. N. Allen, op.cit. pp.88-89.

26. J. Orton, The Complete Plays (London, 1976) pp.150-192.
27. Orton, Diaries, op.cit. p.87.
28. "Doctor Ordered To Be Struck Off", The Times, 6 June, 1969.
29. Morrison, op.cit. p.112.
30. Ibid. p.109.
31. J. Orton, The Complete Plays (London, 1976), pp.361-48.
32. H. Barker, Stripwell and Claw, (London, 1977), pp.123-230. The play's first production was in fact on the 30th January, 1975, thus narrowly missing my designated time, but it is very much a play of our period.
33. Stacey, op.cit. pp.191-92.
34. K. Jones, "Too Few Psychiatric Beds?", New Society, 10 Sep. 1964, pp.22-24.
35. Morrison, op.cit. pp.111-112.
36. Ibid, p.112.
37. As an osteopath, Stephen Ward was not in fact, technically speaking, a doctor, but he was referred to as "doctor Ward" in reports of the Profumo affair, and was, without doubt, in the public's collective mind, a doctor. Dr. Kenneth Williams was, of course, the most senior henchman of Poulson and Smith in the late sixties.
38. J. Orton, The Complete Plays, (London, 1976), pp.63-149.
39. Another resemblance to Dr. Ward is that, as a society doctor, he is able to move amongst senior politicians (in this case, particularly the Prime Minister), and takes advantage (as Ward did not) by attempting to blackmail them.
40. The play has never been published in the form of a text, so I have relied upon plot summaries, particularly those given by Bull, Itzin, and Brenton himself in his Theatre Quarterly interview, (editions for these have been given)
41. The play was written in the immediate aftermath of the Profumo affair, in 1964, but was shelved by the BBC, who commissioned it, for two years. Again, no text exists, but I have a sound recording of the dialogue after watching the recent Armchair Theatre screening of the play.
42. P. Nichols, The National Health, or Nurse Norton's Affair (London, 1970)
43. O. Kerensky, op.cit. p.65.
44. P. Nichols, Feeling You're Behind (Harmondsworth, 1985), p.197.
45. Ibid. pp.204-207.

46. Indeed, Orton's last diary entry before his death tells a similar tale, that of his sister Leonie's experience. A doctor, who was "supposed to be a specialist" had injected his sister with the wrong drug, causing her hand to swell up - Orton Diaries, op.cit. p.10.
47. Morrison, op.cit. p.60.
48. E. Butterworth and D. Weir, Social Problems in Modern Britain (Bungay, 1972), p.217.
49. Morrison, op.cit. pp.58-59.
50. Ibid, p.61.
51. Arnold Bedford, "An English Exam Faces Foreign Doctors", Sunday Mirror, 6 June, 1969.
52. Another allusion to the contemporary tabloid newspaper issue of patient-medic sex is the relationship of Nurse Sweet and Ken. She seems to have been the centre of his sexual attentions early in the play (pp.19-21), and anticipates his return with barely-suppressed delight (p.103), before finding that Ken's latest accident has reduced him to an idiot.
53. J.R. Taylor, The Second Wave, op.cit. pp.27-30.
54. R. Cushman, "Theatre", The Spectator, 25 Oct. 1969.
55. I. Wardle, quoted in G. & B. Lloyd Evans, op.cit. p.165.
56. Ibid. p.167.
57. K. Worth, op.cit. p.39.
58. A. Bennett, Forty Years On and Other Plays (London, 1985), pp.185-257.
59. "Police Friends Not Enemies", The Guardian, 3 June, 1964.
60. "PC's Hair Pulled Out By Gang", The Guardian, 6 Oct. 1964.
61. "Parliament: Complaints Against Police", New Society, 17 Dec. 1964.
62. J. Hart, "Some Reflections on the Report of The Royal Commission On The Police", P. Rose (ed), Policy Making in Britain, (London, 1969), p.243.
63. P. Terson, Zigger Zaggar/Mooney and His Caravans (Harmondsworth, 1970)
64. P. Ableman, Tests (London, 1966)
65. Interview, J.F. McCrindle, op. cit. p.121.
66. The first production of What The Butler Saw occurred in 1969, but it must be remembered that the play was written in drafts from late 1966 until summer 1967, when it was completed only in provisional form. Orton died in August 1967.

67. Match is bodily injured whilst performing a bodily function (p.436). Orton seems to be saying that the police are only human, in the traditional farceur's manner.
68. J. Orton, The Complete Plays, (London, 1976), pp.321-360. Written in 1966 and again produced posthumously.
69. Ibid. pp.29-61.
70. Ibid. pp.277-320.
71. A. Doig, Corruption and Misconduct In Contemporary British Politics (Harmondsworth, 1984), pp.213 and 236.
72. K. Russell, "Complaints Against The Police", New Society, 11 Dec. 1969.
73. Ibid. p.941.
74. K. Gardner, "Detectives in Bank Raid Plot", The People, 27 Oct. 1968, and K. Gardner, "Post Office Raid Set Up By Detective", The People, 3 Nov. 1968.
75. "CID Bribes Murder Squad Man to Probe Charges", Sunday Mirror, 30 Nov. 1969.
76. B. Cox, J. Shirley and M. Short, The Fall of Scotland Yard (Harmondsworth, 1977) pp.13-83. My account of each of these scandals will be taken from this document, which is drawn predominantly from contemporary newspapers and TV documentaries on the crisis.
77. Doig, op.cit. pp.307-308.
78. Cox, Shirley and Short, op.cit. pp.84-131.
79. Ibid, pp.140-211.
80. Ibid, p.81.
81. Kerensky, op.cit. p.208.
82. H. Brenton, Revenge (London, 1970)
83. J. Bull, op.cit. p.37.
84. The first two series of the programme were made in 1969 and 1970. Again, no text exists but the episode is written in the form of an article in: G. Chapman, J. Cleese, T. Gilliam, E. Idle, T. Jones and M. Palin, Monty Python's Big Red Bok (London, 1972)
85. Cox, Shirley and Short, op.cit. p.158.
86. There was also, as will be noted later, a significant increase in accusations of racism against the police in 1969.
87. "Complaints Against The Police", New Society, 20 August, 1970.
88. Hare, op.cit. pp.250-252.

89. H. Brenton, Plays For the Poor Theatre (London, 1980), pp.25-55.
90. T. Stoppard, After Magritte (London, 1971)
91. R. Mark, In The Office of Constable (London, 1979) p.308.
92. Hart, op.cit. p.241.
93. Ibid. pp.241-243.
94. "Evans on Law", New Society, 24 Oct. 1968.
95. Cox, Shirley and Short, op.cit. pp.91 and 92.
96. J. Orton, Up Against It (London, 1979)
97. T. Stoppard, Jumpers (London, 1972)
98. Cox, Shirley and Short, op.cit. p.181.
99. Ibid, pp.186-187.
100. Ibid. p.188.
101. Ibid. p.101.
102. "Inspector Low to be Discharged", The Times, 31 August, 1973.
103. "Evans on Law", op.cit.
104. B. Cox, Civil Liberties in Great Britain (Harmondsworth, 1975), pp. 169-70.
105. Ibid. Idem.
106. Ibid. p.169.
107. I. Will, The Big Brother Society (London, 1983) p.48.
108. Russell, op.cit. pp.941-42.
109. Cox, op.cit. p.168.
110. Cox, op.cit. p.170.
111. Of particular interest is the raid on the London home of Mick Jagger in May 1969, where Jagger also claimed that the officer leading the raid, a Detective Sergeant Constable (what would Joe Heller say!), had solicited a bribe to help Jagger escape conviction. The charge of bribery was not proven, but after an investigation into the sergeant's conduct, Jagger was cleared of the charge of possessing cannabis, (Cox, Shirley and Short, op.cit. pp.56-57).
112. In fact, in 1971 Reg Gale, Chairman of the Police Federation, had controversially admitted his belief that the law worked "in favour of the rich against the poor" (Cox, op.cit. p.163).
113. Ibid. p.178.

114. Ibid. pp.171-175.
115. Interview: S. Trussler (ed), op.cit. p.65.
116. A contemporary review of the play's first performance although one need look only as far as the back cover of the original Faber edition.
117. Trussler, op.cit. p.63.
118. "White Weakness", New Society, 20 August, 1970.
119. Brenton, op.cit. Plays For the Poor Theatre, pp.91-104.
120. Brenton, op.cit. Plays For the Poor Theatre, pp.55-76.
121. "Bitterness About Allocation of Graft", The Times, 3 June, 1969.
122. L. Manifold, "Police Chief and Porno King", Sunday People, 22 Feb. 1972.
123. "Let's Open Up A Brothel, said Chief Constable", Sunday People, 26 March, 1972.
124. Orton, Diaries, op.cit. p.291.
125. Ibid. Between pp.192 and 193.
126. M. Charney, Joe Orton (London, 1984), plate 2a.
127. Cox, Shirley and Short, op.cit. pp.133-34.
128. Ibid. p.21.
129. Will, op.cit. p.52.
130. Ibid. p.69.
131. P.J. Stead, The Police of Britain (London, 1985), pp.113-114.
132. Cox, op.cit. p.187.
133. Cox, op.cit. pp.180-181.
134. Ibid. p.182.
135. Cox, Shirley and Short, op.cit. p.33-34.
136. "Chief Constable Lifts Ban on News", The Times, 8 May, 1964.
137. Cox, op.cit. p.186.
138. "Denials by Flying Squad Officers", The Times, 16 Oct. 1964.
139. Doig, op.cit. p.30.
140. S. Spencer, Called To Account: The Case For Police Accountability (London, 1985), p.57.

141. "Statement On Challenor Soon", The Guardian, 5 June, 1964.
142. "Tribunal Takes No Notice of Anonymous Letters", The Times, 9 Oct. 1966.
143. Lahr, op.cit. p.232.
144. Ibid. p.224.
145. Ibid. p.239.
146. Ibid. p.236.
147. A. Hunt, "What Joe Orton Saw", New Society, 20 July, 1975.
148. Lahr, op.cit. pp.236-37.
149. B. Nightingale, An Introduction to 50 Modern British Plays (London, 1982), p.385.
150. Taylor, op.cit. The Second Wave, p.132.
151. Ibid. p.133.
152. Ibid. Idem.
153. Ibid. p.218.
154. Kerensky, op.cit. p.224.
155. Lahr, op.cit. pp.250-51.
156. Ibid. pp.240-41.
157. Ibid. p.241.
158. Ibid. p.254-56.
159. Ibid. p.243.
160. Ibid. p.262.
161. "Underworld Offered £1,000 to Frame Challenor", The Times, 2 Oct. 1964.
162. "Sergeant Challenor Worked 102 Hours in One Week", The Times, 29 Sep. 1964.
163. Lahr, op.cit. p.237.
164. "Underworld offered..." op.cit.
165. "Challenor Reached End of His Tether - Inquiry Told of Persecution Mania", The Guardian, 1 Oct. 1964.
166. "Challenor Inquiry Told of Frame Ups", The Guardian, 8 Oct. 1964.
167. "Sergeant Challenor Wanted", op.cit. p.155.

168. "Witness said Challenor asked for £150", The Times, 21 Oct.1964.
169. "Challenor Reached End of Tether", op.cit.
170. Lahr, op.cit. p.236.
171. C.W.E. Bigsby, op.cit. pp.43-45.
172. "Challenor Inquiry told of Frame ups", op.cit.
173. "Barrister says that Sergeant appeared 'rather odd'", The Times, 14 Oct. 1964.
174. "Counsel Protests about Cross Examination", The Times, 8 Oct. 1964.
175. An identical description of a blow struck by Challenor comes from one of his most noted victims, Donald Roum.
176. "Witness Said Sergeant Asked for £150", op.cit.
177. "Challenor Inquiry Told of Frame-Ups", op.cit.
178. Barrister said Sergeant "rather odd", op.cit.
179. "Sergeant Thought He Would Be First Policeman on the Moon", The Times, 28 Oct. 1964.
180. Ibid.
181. Ibid.
182. "Challenor Enquiry: Wife says he thought he would be killed", The Times, 24 Oct. 1964.
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187. "Challenor Tribunal ask for evidence of 1962 Case", The Times, 30 Oct. 1964.
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C O N C L U S I O N

I suppose the question which must be posed by the reader at the end of my survey is "why should we conclude our assessment in 1974?" The most immediate answer would perhaps be to examine the changes in direction which have overtaken a number of the writers with whom I have been concerned. In the case of some of those writers who would be dubbed "minor dramatists" of the period by most critics there was simply a fading away. As black comedy became less immediately fashionable, such writers as Ableman, Antrobus, Pinner and Luke (the latter turning his back, quite ostentatiously, upon the stage after the failure of Bloomsbury in 1974)¹ began to have difficulty in finding major stages for their plays. Livings, too, became increasingly marginalised by the critical establishment. Driven from London by a lack of stages, and "never satisfied with being a playwright for the critics, he is now living in his native Lancashire and is indifferent to success in the London theatre".² Bigsby's complaint of Livings, that "he offers no solutions except an anarchic resistance to any authority",³ might be construed as a compliment in the historical context of plays such as Eh? and The Little Mrs. Foster Show, yet it is clearly intended as a literary obituary.

Cregan has continued to work from The Orange Tree Theatre, Richmond, although critical interest in his work has diminished since his days at the Royal Court. The change of tone which occurs in Tina (1975)⁴ is representative of a general alteration in the work of many of those writers who had formerly written black comedies. The title character, a crusading but uncertain liberal teacher, who might easily have appeared in Miniatures, has her excesses checked by the teachers around her:

LOUISE (Patiently): Institutions have to be allowed

to work. Schools have enough troubles with staff shortages and bad buildings and lack of money. They need protecting from uninformed attacks by those obsessed with their own failure. (p.58)

Cregan clearly intends his audience to identify with such positive, social democratic sentiments in this play, and therefore significantly alters the bleak and despairing voice which characterised his former work. The play makes for a significant comparison with Miniatures, for both are written around Cregan's former profession of teacher. George Devine had nicknamed Miniatures "Mr. Cregan's Profession"⁵, but although based at a school, it is, as I have argued, more concerned with allegorising the state of the nation, lashing out left and right at all belief structures, than discussing the problems which exist within education in 1965. Tina, on the other hand, is a play which quite specifically addresses such issues as the underfunding of education, and the problems of teachers dealing with underprivileged children such as Dawn, the working-class child who has been sexually assaulted by her father, and who possesses none of the affluent certainty and bourgeois aspiration of Cregan's earlier students, Janet and Simpson. The altered economic circumstances portrayed by the play are central to the change of tone, but as the same circumstances drove such writers as Brenton and Stoppard to the left and right respectively, Cregan's more moderate socialism was seldom heard behind the dramatic polemics.

A striking illustration of the change which overtook the "major" writers of our survey is David Hare, whose first play after Knuckle was Fanshen (1975), a play which not only abandons black comedy for social realism, but in its Chinese location,

turns away from the characteristic obsession with Britain and the British. In this play Hare is roughly supportive of the revolution, as it affects a single village, finding a form of affirmation in radicalism, which he had been unable to find in the character of Joanna, the revolutionary of Slag. Although subsequently returning to the British in plays such as Plenty (1978), Hare prefers a naturalistic approach, and even in this relatively despairing play, manages to find some semblance of constructive political solutions through the character of Alice. Even Barnes, one of the few writers still writing in the idiom of black humour, has found it difficult to find a major stage for his unquestionably important work. Up to 1985 Barnes had had only two original works produced in London by major companies, and encountered some difficulty having both Laughter (1978) and Red Noses (1985) produced.⁶

The change of economic circumstances which led to the desire for more positive political solutions which I noted earlier, in the works of Cregan, is indicative of a general decline in the number of black comedies produced in the latter half of the seventies. This is not to say that plays of this style became defunct altogether. Into the eighties such notable examples as Barker's The Loud Boy's Life (1980), Brenton's and Hare's Pravda (1985) and Churchill's Serious Money (1987) were produced, each of them representing, in the traditions of the form, responses to specific events and recognisable personalities of the day. Barker and Wilson have continued to produce plays similar to their early styles, although even the latter, in work such as The Grass Widow (1983) has tended more toward naturalism than had earlier seemed likely.

The general change of style was, of course, foreshadowed

in the latter half of our period by the general recognition of social determinism, of broader events, rather than individuals, determining the lives and actions of individuals. Under such circumstances, the desire of writers to show a greater psychological depth in their characters was understandable. This led to the increasingly tenuous use of farce, a technique which had been at the heart of black comedy. To some extent, plays such as The Great Exhibition and The Pleasure Principle, where farce is employed to demonstrate its own redundancy in a world where no desire or act, regardless of its baseness, need be concealed, represent an acting out of this change of direction, a purgation of black comedy within black comedy.

For all this, the unities of theme and imagery should be stressed over the changes which occurred among the satirical comedies of 1964 to 1974. While the rise of the New Right represented a turning point in dramatic style of writers, the imagery through which a decadent, declining society was portrayed remained the same. A good demonstration of this is the parallel scenes in Three Men for Colverton (pp.71-86) and The Sea (pp.151-159), where there are farcical struggles for power involving the dead talisman of an urn full of human ashes, culminating in physical struggles during supposedly sacred rites. In each play something which is dead, and could not be more dead, represents a symbol of paradoxical omnipotence in a living, vital world. This, in plays which are separated by eight years, and a considerable historical change. Similarly, human remains, be they complete (Loot and Jumpers) or partial (The Little Mrs. Foster Show and Pignight) are emblematic of the the power of the world of the dead over that of the living in a declining and corrupt state.

Similarly, images and forebodings of an apocalyptic end to British society as we know it are common throughout the period. From the destruction of all and sundry at the climax of Eh?, through the apocalyptic imagery of Early Morning and The Borage Pigeon Affair, to the terrifying conclusion of The Bewitched, there is a sense of the exhaustion of the old forms and a hint that if anything at all is to replace them, the new world will be yet worse. The world of black comedy from 1964 to 1974 is one modelled very closely upon the political events and scandals of its period. Like that period, it is a world in which no institution or figure of authority can offer solutions, a world in which corrupt and depraved individuals can struggle only for their own gains, against the power of what Halliwell called The Absurd State.

FOOTNOTES

1. Coskren, op.cit. p.315.
2. Weimer, op.cit. p.310.
3. C.W.E. Bigsby, "Henry Livings", Vinson, op.cit. p.494.
4. D. Cregan, Poor Tom and Tina (London, 1976), pp.39-64.
5. Wardle, The Theatres of..., op.cit. p.269.
6. "The Playwright Who Can't Find a Stage", Guardian, 18 Sep. 1979.

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